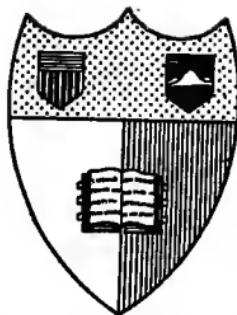


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Shakespeare's Macbeth; an oriental study.



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Shakespeare's Macbeth :

AN ORIENTAL STUDY.

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FOREWORD.

The Religion and the Literature of the Hindus have wonderfully stood the crucible test of time. It is by virtue of their intrinsic worth that India has been able to force from denying hands her rightful claim to recognition ; and these, indeed, constitute her distinctive nationhood. So upon the proved rock of her ancient civilization must India root her new foundation, and carefully harmonize with it whatever may come from outside, if she is really earnest about a sure and progressive future. History declares in no uncertain voice that no nation has ever attained true and lasting greatness without a large measure of self-respect ; and it is painfully apparent that in this very supreme quality we are wofully wanting. It is really an irony of fate that the same West that smiled upon the Land of The Rising Sun like Minerva with her light and knowledge, came to Hindusthan like a veritable Circe ! Indeed, the lurid, maddening light of her material beauty so dazed us that we deplorably lost all power of judgment. We foolishly yielded to her bewitching seduction and began to blindly swallow whatever was offered us without the

least suspicion that it might be a magic potion ! The flow of Western Civilization was thus threatening to sweep away everything before it, and the fate of Hinduism itself was trembling in the balance when came forward Rama Mohon, followed by Srikrishna Prasanna, Sashadhor and Lord Sri Ram Krishna to stem the swelling tide. Soon after, Vivekananda, in the Parliament of Religion, won the palm for Hinduism by thundering the lofty and sublime doctrines of the Vedanta in the listening ears of the astounded apostles of modern Christianity, who hung down their heads in shame to think that they sent missionaries to teach the land at whose feet they had yet to learn even the rudiments of Spiritual Culture for ages to come ! Since that memorable event the straying minds of many a deluded person have come round, and thus the position of the Hindu Religion has somewhat been secure. Christianity, finding very little favour with the rational Indians, has since turned back and is now seen to make some headway among the depressed classes. But that is certainly due not to their predilection for the Gospel of Christ but to an undeniable cause for which we ourselves are solely responsible. That is the inevitable consequence of the grossly unjust and

an-Hindu treatment meted out to so many human beings by the so-called privileged classes—a treatment which the spirit of the age cannot too strongly condemn.

The fate of Hindu Literature, however, is as dark as ever. For the cruel neglect that it has so long been subjected to by those of whom it is the least expected, the prevailing system of education is wholly responsible. We are forced to drink deep at the fountain-head of a foreign literature, while our own is given a curt go by. The cold shouldering that it receives is enough to make it virtually a “forbidden fruit.” Thus we come out of the tedious tuition of a university, on a thoroughly alien basis, like full-fledged parrots, carefully taught to belaud to the sky Shakespeare, Milton and Byron, whose thoughts have very little “enriched the blood of the world”—of the East, at least—a paradox which can only be verified by a patient and comparative study—while our Valmiki, Vyasa and Kalidas, who really come under the Tennysonian definition, roll upon the plain! The consequence is alarmingly serious. We are nationally and morally degraded. Our power of reasoning is deadend with a constant bias in favour of the West. We are prone to admire anything that

clear at the very outset. I shall be wofully misjudged if I am understood to have written this in a pure spirit of blind malignity simply to vilify and traduce Shakespeare. Far from that. What I honestly want is to dispel the deluding moonshine of unscrupulous criticism. My motto is "Speak the Truth and speak it ever, Cost it what it will." And with this end in view this review is intended only to serve as an eye-opener, and I shall, no doubt, be amply rewarded if it even partially fulfil this avowed purpose.

I cannot conclude before I mention with a profound feeling of veneration and gratitude the revered name of Bābu Amulya Charan Roy of Barisal, whose high sense of patriotism and sincere love of literature are not only commendable but worthy of emulation. It was at the instance of this energetic scholar of juvenescent spirits that I felt impelled to venture on this daring enterprise. I have no hesitation in gratefully acknowledging that I have been greatly helped by many of his wise and valuable suggestions, and but for him this little work would not have possibly seen the light.

Taki, 24 Perganas,
BENGAL.
March, 1921.

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THE AUTHOR.

OPINIONS.

Mr. Nritya Lal Mookerjee, Principal, B. M. College, Barisal says :—I have gone through Mr. Smarajit Dutt's paper on "Shakespeare's Macbeth : An Oriental Study." * * * * I have seen enough to appreciate Mr. Dutt's command of language, felicity of expression and thorough acquaintance with Shakespeare. *He seems to know every rock and quicksand in Macbeth.* It is a great pleasure to find such a devoted student of Shakespeare. *The ingenuity of some of his interpretations is extremely praise-worthy.*

Mr. Sourendra Kumer Choudhury, Senior Professor of English, B. M. College, Barisal writes :—Smarajit Babu's paper on Macbeth is *entirely original.* *He has established most of the views he has advanced quite creditably.* Of late, Shakespeare has become an idol in England, Germany, France and America. Smarajit Babu is an iconoclast, and though the School he belongs to is in a minority, still, in this Age of Science and Reason, all attempts to remove superstition in religion or literature are attempts in the right direction. Viewed in this light, Smarajit Babu, as a pioneer among Indian critics, *aiming at a real evaluation of Shakespeare, has shown moral courage besides commendable critical acumen.*

SHAKESPEARE'S MACBETH :

AN ORIENTAL STUDY.

Shakespeare has been pronounced to be the greatest poet and dramatist the world has ever known. The recognition that he received during his life-time was not very enviable ; and surely the deer-stealer could not even dream, far less believe, that there would come a time when his name would be gifted with the power of conjuration. With his death his plays sank into oblivion from which Garrick, some two centuries afterwards, raised them to light again, and they have, ever since, been blanketed, as it were, from the four quarters of the globe. Indeed, his merits have been so exhaustively dealt with, that not a sheaf has been left for the despairing gleaner. So if we wish to say anything about this "Sweetest Shakespeare, Fancy's Child," we must be under the painful necessity of having recourse to showing the other side of the shield —a very bad business, no doubt, and hazardous too, for, thereby we take the risk of lending

ourselves to being thought to be rushing in where angels fear to tread. Yet, it is none the less important, if a really correct estimate is to be formed of the "Swan of Avon" who has, of late, been made a fetish by the literary world.

We see spots on the bright face of the shining moon, even the dazzling sun could not long conceal his defects from the searching eyes of the astronomer. How can we then expect that Shakespeare, a man, after all, whose birth-failing it is to err, should be without his flaws ?

It has been rightly said that Shakespeare is at his best in his tragedies ; and among all his tragedies *Macbeth* stands out the highest. Drake calls it "the greatest effort of our author's genius, and the most sublime and impressive drama which the world has ever beheld." The poet Campbell who is quite sure that "It is distance that lends enchantment to the view" declares, "*Macbeth* is our greatest possession in dramatic poetry." Of course, there is no knowing what the honest opinion of these enthusiastic admirers would have been if they had occasion to see from close quarters. Appreciation or depreciation has hardly been impartial, and is generally fashioned by the critic's particular way of thinking. The same thing may appear as

quite different in different moods. "The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a Heaven of Hell or a Hell of Heaven."

If a man

"Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks
Sermons in stones and good in everything,"

surely the full credit belongs to the seeing observer and not to the objects. There are, indeed, very few persons who can see that "Things are not what they seem." Men are generally loudest about that of which they know the least. We are ever forward to pronounce our uncalled-for opinion on a subject of which we have no first-hand knowledge. Like the unreasoning dogs in the fable, we join in a chorus to echo the voice that is raised, and only play the reverberator, without caring to enquire whence or why! Here is what an American authority says : "Shakespeare's proud position to-day is possible only through the fact that he is not read. We get our Shakespeare from Bartlett's Quotations." He further goes on, "In all my life, I never knew anybody, save one woman and a little girl, who read Shakespeare in the original. I know a deal of Shakespeare, although I never read one of his plays"! This is the way in which weighty criticisms are manufac-

tured, and simple readers, without suspecting that the lion may paint himself, get enamoured of the work and exclaim in all admiration "How nice!"

THE SUPERNATURAL ELEMENT.

We have quoted above to show that in the considered opinion of accredited authorities *Macbeth* is the greatest work of Shakespeare; and we cannot but take up this very *Macbeth* for our subject of discussion. We are, indeed, very sorry to have to say that the very first scene of this master-piece is open to criticism. The curtain having been raised, the uncouth figures of three unearthly creatures are revealed to our wandering eyes, amidst thunder and lightning. "The true reason," says Coleridge, "for the first appearance of the witches is to strike the key-note of the character of the whole drama." But in striking the key-note, we are inclined to think, the green hand of the dramatist has been betrayed. Sense of propriety has been sacrificed, perhaps unconsciously, to fore-shadowing events. There is no denying that this meeting of the Weird Sisters wholly concerns themselves. They can have no reason to make themselves visible, in questionable forms,

to the mortal eye. We say questionable, because there is no knowing how they look or talk when they move about among themselves. Hence there can be no doubt that this supernatural council should be held unseen. To represent this is surely going beyond one's limit—to try the impossible. Of course, we know that the poet's fine frenzy can give to airy nothing a local habitation and a name, and we do not mean to invalidate the poet's license. The question would not arise at all, if we were not struck by the undue liberty that has been taken here to present two different aspects of the supernatural in an identical manner, where propriety demands the rigid observance of a clear and sharp distinction. That they are not always visible strongly proves that their ways are quite different from what they assume on the occasion of their coming in contact with human beings. That is the point, very subtle, no doubt, which we mean to emphasise here.

Nor is the scene necessary either. For, what useful purpose does it serve in relation to the plot of the play ? It only tells us that a battle is being fought in which Macbeth has taken part. This we can gather from the next scene—and that, perhaps, more dramatically, and at

the same time spare the author a repetition. Here is again another important point lost. For, when we see the witches again in the third scene, our interest in their weird appearance flags—a rotten dramatic irony ! While, on the other hand, if they were made to appear there for the first time, and as suddenly as they vanished, how intense would be the supernatural effect ! Further, the audience would thus have been relieved of the tedious trouble of helplessly listening to their garrulous nonsense ; and what is more, what an admirable dramatic stroke it would have been to raise, by steps, the curiosity of the audience, by making them look wonderingly on these unearthly creatures, eye to eye, with Banquo ! The representation of Act III Sc. 5 is also equally impugnable. Denizens of the other world should not be made to appear so often. Thereby they lose their uncanny nature and become too tame and familiar. Their appearances in Act I Sc. 3 and in Act IV Sc. 1 are perfectly natural. For, there they purposely take forms to make themselves visible.

If the play would open with the third scene, all the above charges could be easily avoided, and at the same time "the key-note of the

character of the whole play" could also be struck.

To a careful reader the whole play will clearly appear to be an illustration of Banquo's remark :

"And often times, to win us to our harm
The instruments of darkness tell us truths,
Win us with honest trifles, to betray's
In deepest consequence." - Act I Sc. 3 ll. 123-26

So we can well understand how prominent a part "does the supernatural element play here. But we must frankly say the treatment thereof is not quite satisfactory. To justify the abrupt transformation of so noble and magnificent a character demands supernatural intervention. But the question is whether the supernatural is to hold sway over the natural or *vice versa*. Now opinions may vary according to the conception of the supernatural. We differ from the view that holds that supernatural beings have no direct or compelling influence over man, that they help his actions only indirectly—by mere idle suggestions. For, this is not only ignoring the real sense of the term "supernatural" which clearly speaks for itself, but bringing them down to the level of timid, weak human beings. Of course, we do not deny that they can have no power over super-human minds.

Man is composed of the evil and the good. He is intermediary between the brutish and the divine. The conception of the supernatural is, accordingly, a two-fold one—Spirits, good and evil,—of course, if there really exist such spirits to externally influence the destiny of man. Thus the mischievous evil spirits are supposed to work upon his baser nature to drag him down, while the good ones are believed to appeal to his higher nature, and try to uplift him by helping him to break the manacles of his sworn enemy. Thus man's life is one long continued struggle for triumph of the one over the other. But it would be foolish to judge by the achievements of a single life which is too brief for the signal success to be eventually won by the good. "To err is human" gives a general but fair idea of the measure of the evil element in man. Yet the conquering force—the force of will, lies with him, if he would only exert it. But, O, the pity of it ! The mustard seeds wherewith to exorcise the devil are themselves possessed. So when we see or hear of a man getting the better of the evil, we credit him with possessing super-human power. Satan's failure to seduce Christ was simply due to that he had to deal with Christ and not with Adam.

Now, it may be asked, why could Banquo, not a superhuman being, get over the influence. The answer is simple. In the first place, the Weird Sisters did not mean to victimize Banquo. They had business with Macbeth alone, as is evident from the proceedings of their meeting in the first scene. Secondly, their prediction to Banquo which was not voluntary but a forced one—a fact which goes to confirm the first point—did not concern Banquo directly ; so he could have no reason to trouble himself about how he could smooth the way for his children to the throne, and thus he could easily dismiss the idea. Lastly, in his case also the poison influence of the evil presence could not but make itself felt. For, it did not leave Banquo, wholly untouched, although no direct campaign was designed against him. For, we learn from his own words how sorely their thought troubled his sleep :

“A heavy summons lies like lead upon me,
And yet I would not sleep. Merciful powers,
Restrain in me the cursed thoughts that nature
Gives way to in repose !” Act II, Sc. 1, ll. 6-9.

Soon after we hear him confess to Macbeth that he actually dreamed of them ; and his concluding yearning, though suppressed, only demonstrated

the power of the supernatural influence. Says he :

"I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters :
To you they have show'd some truth."

Act II, Sc. 1, ll. 20-21.

The yearning latterly takes the colour of fervent hope in his soliloquy :

"Why, by the verities on thee made good,
May they not be my oracles as well,
And set me up in hope ?" Act III, Sc. 1, ll. 8-10.

Thus we see how strong is the personal influence of the supernatural.

We have said above that the treatment thereof is not quite satisfactory ; and we shall try to further justify our remark. As soon as the witches see Macbeth and Banquo coming, they dance out an evil art and say, " Peace ; the charm's wound up." But when we hear Macbeth demand in the imperious tone of the Generalissimo, " Speak, I charge," we see the desired effect has not been produced. Macbeth is not completely under the influence of the charm. We are rather tempted to pooh-pooh their necromancy. The inefficacy of their art has further been made clear in Hecate's speech in Act III, Sc. 5. There the witch-queen admonishes

her agents by saying :—“ How did you dare to trade and traffic with Macbeth? * * * Make amends now * * * * He will come to know his destiny.” Here Macbeth’s coming to know his destiny is purely of his own accord. Were it under supernatural influence Hecate would say, “ I have made him come ” or words to that effect. Further, it sets a very poor value on an interview with the supernatural, as it can easily be had for the mere wishing.

But in the achievements of Lady Macbeth we see how the natural beats the supernatural. For, when better sense prevails, Macbeth shakes off the wicked influence, if any, and we are glad to be able to heave a sigh of relief when we hear him declare in the determined tone of the General : “ We will proceed no further in the business.” But Lady Macbeth, only a human-being, yet, characterized to be infinitely more powerful than the supernatural trio, “ pours her spirits in his ear, And chastises with the valour of her tongue All that impedes him from the golden round.” The watery mind of the resolute General is very easily reshaped and congealed, and he is heard to say :

“ I am settled and bend up
Each corporal agent to this terrible feat.”

Act I, Sc. 7, ll. 79-80.

Thus what the supernatural could not accomplish the natural finds no difficulty to perform.

By the way, we feel impelled to remark here in this connection that henpeckedness and chivalry are the two most incongruous elements which are hardly seen to go hand in hand. Chivalry includes honouring the fair sex ; or in other words, respect for women is one of the many qualities that go to constitute chivalry. But henpeckedness and honouring the women are as distinct from each other as night and day. In fact one is the very antithesis of the other. Shakespeare ought to understand that in offering the sceptre to Lady Macbeth he commits treason against recorded facts. And the charge is seriously substantiated by the fact that to Macbeth's henpeckedness there is no parallel. Playing into the hands of his hellish wife he murders the sleeping royal guest—a deed which is to be condemned as the most flagrant outrage against chivalry itself. Furthermore, History very prominently points out that no woman-ruled creature—by woman-ruled we mean governed by a termagant wife—has ever made even a man, much less a successful general, of himself. Only Mark Antony may be said to provide an exception. But that valiant Roman, the worthy com-

peer of Cæsar, did not cowardly submit to the valour of the tongue of his 'Serpent of the Nile' but out of uncontrollable infatuation, he allowed himself to be taken in the toils of her fascinating beauty. He had borne himself very honourably, no doubt, before he was bewitched by the Egyptian Queen. And since that ill-starred moment his brilliant fame had ever been on the wane. Thus Mark Antony is not only not an exception but rather strongly proves the theory. Leaving the domain of History when we come to view the ordinary life we see no self-respecting man has ever allowed himself to be governed by a bad wife. Even so docile a man as Rip Van Winkle could not long tolerate the "curtaining-lectures." Yet, what he actually bore robbed him of so much of his night's repose that to make good the loss he had to take a nap of—twenty years !

But to return. The second predictions of the witches cannot be called predictions in the strictest sense of the word. Supernatural utterances, unlike the Delphic oracles which were only juggleries of cheating priests, must come true, and by no means should they turn into ludicrous equivocations. Glamis, Cawdor, King, and that to Banquo are real prophecies. They

have been fulfilled to the letter, and there is no equivocating there.

"Macbeth shall never vanquished be until
Great Birnam wood to high Dunsinane hill
Shall come against him". Act IV, Sc. 1, ll. 92-97.

—should likewise have been verified. The wood as a whole—each and every tree, root and branch, not missing even the sylvan inhabitants—ought to have bodily removed. Each marching soldier holding a hewn branch and thus taking the false appearance of a moving forest can not be called a prediction of a supernatural being fulfilling itself. Nor can it be called an equivocation even. That would surely be a misnomer. For that must clearly have a double-meaning, which is wofully wanting here. For instance, if a person is told that he shall be a king reigning over a land where no body will dispute his right ; and if he, all-expectant, looking forward to its fulfilment, chances to be situated like Alexander Selkirk, then we may say here is an equivocation, indeed. The witches are ministers of darkness and they mislead. There can be no two opinions about that. But it is not doing them justice to say that they cannot even equivocate properly, much less predict. If they really mean to mislead

by equivocations they know how best they can do so.

The same arguments equally hold good in the other case also. The second apparition assures :

Laugh to scorn

The power of man. For none of woman born
Shall harm Macbeth." Act IV, Sc. 1, ll. 79-81

Act IV Sc 1 ll 78-81

But what actually happens ? Macduff kills Macbeth. Is not Macduff a man ? Is he not born of woman ? Has he dropped from the clouds ? Is he a denizen of the realm of Neptune ? Has a female quadruped brought him forth ? or, shall we conclude from the murderer's remark "you egg", as he stabbed the child, that the father is also of the same breed ? Oh, no, not to be sure ! A man begot him in a woman, and that is as certain as the day follows the night. From a shapeless embryo he developed into a manikin, not in the least deformed. How is it then that he kills Macbeth ? Ah, must you hear ? Why, "Macduff was from his mother's womb untimely ripp'd," Now, we see ! Then he must be the right person to fulfil the prediction of the ~~Witches~~ ! If the words of supernatural beings are so lightly treated, they would do well not to meddle in human affairs at all !

THE THANE OF CAWDOR.

Next we shall take up the most controversial point, the thane of Cawdor.

In Act 1 Sc 2, Ross comes with the news of victory and reports :

“Norway himself

* * * *

Assisted by that most disloyal traitor

The thane of Cawdor, began a dismal conflict

* * * *

* * * and to conclude

The victory fell to us.”

The king at once decides on the spur of the moment :

“No more that thane of Cawdor shall deceive
Our bosom : go pronounce his instant death,
And with his former title greet Macbeth.”

Now, we have learned from the witches in the first scene, “That will be ere the set of sun”, which implies the battle is to be over before sunset, that is late in the afternoon. As soon as the fighting comes to an end on an armistice, the peace terms are dictated, and Ross comes from Fife where the battle is fought, to the royal camp near Forres. We are not told anything about the army. We only see the generals fall in with the witches on their way back to the royal camp which does not seem very far off, as

Ross and Angus's coming forward to welcome them clearly shows. In the next scene, *i.e.* Sc. 4, we see the overjoyed king receives the victorious generals from the palace. This undoubtedly indicates that he removed there overnight. Macbeth and Banquo, most probably, pass the night in the vacated camp near Forres and see the king next morning, considering the camp cannot be considerably distant from the Forres palace. Now the distance between Forres and Fife is nearly 100 miles to cover which the swiftest horse is likely to take at least full five hours. Hence the night must have been far advanced before either Ross or the generals reached the camp, if they really rode the distance and not walked it, for the idea of walking was sheer madness, especially for Macbeth and Banquo after the day's toil. But it appears from the proceedings of Scs. 2 and 3 that the time was not evening yet. For Ross came just when the king had done with the sergeant and the captains had a clear and distinct sight of the witches—not missing their “choppy fingers” and “skinny lips”—as though the encounter were in broad daylight. To work wonders like these Aladdin's Lamp or the Wishing Carpet must be brought into requisition.

tion, as mere imagination is lamentably helpless here !

But what is more puzzling is the king's question in Act I Sc. 4 :

Is the execution done on Cowdor ? Are not
Those in commission yet returned ?

and Malcolm's reply thereto :

"My liege,
They are not yet come back. But I have spoke
With one that saw him die : Who did report
That very frankly he confess'd his treason" Act I Sc. 4.

Now, the question is : is it probable to effect, in the course of a few hours in the night, the execution of a thane, a person of a very high rank, higher than that to which Macbeth belongs, who must have been careful enough to guard himself against being caught, before he sided with the invader, Norway, whose situation after the battle is not at all clear, nor the charge substantiated, as we learn from Angus's speech in reply to Macbeth's enquiry ?

Here are the words of Angus :

"Whether he was combined
With those of Norway, or did line the rebel
With hidden help and vantage, or that with both
He laboured his country's wreck, I know not ;"

—Yet he has the impudence to add :

But treasons capital, confess'd and proved.

Have overthrown him !” Act I Sc. 3 ll 111-116.

He does not know—nor even his companion, Ross, upon whose report the death sentence has been pronounced—how the thane is implicated in the affair, yet he says very glibly the guilt is confessed, which is a lie. For the confession is a dying one and is not heard of until it is reported by somebody else who witnessed the execution, as is evident from Malcolm's speech, quoted above.

Thus, we see the thane of Cawdor is convicted on purely hearsay evidence—without an enquiry, without a trial. And the sentence of execution is no sooner passed than carried out with lightning speed, or shall we say, in anticipation of the royal order. For the prince hears the death-news possibly from a sight-seeing third person and not from “those in commission” who are yet to get back ! But why this unwarrantable hurrying through ? Was the play likely to be seriously affected if the execution was delayed ?

There is, however, another and more serious question : Does Macbeth know this disloyalty of Cawdor ? If the traitor joined the battle in

person there is no denying that Macbeth is aware of it. Editors dispute over this vital point. Some charge Shakespeare with inconsistency, while others try to defend him. Among the defenders again, there are some who hold that the divine playwright is incapable of any inconsistency—he is above all charges and thus resort to the safest course of vindication that Sc. 2 is not Shakespeare's. But those who know the value of moderation proceed to defend with views, diametrically opposite. And herein lies the humour of the controversy.

Verity in his note on Macbeth's question in Act I Sc. 3 II 72, 73

“But how of Cowdor ? the thane of Cowdor lives,
A prosperous gentleman.”

very emphatically says :—“ Macbeth must have known that Cawdor was a captured rebel : how then could he describe him as a ‘prosperous gentleman ?’ Some editors see in this a strong argument that Shakespeare did not write 1. 2. 50-66 or Sc. 2 at all. But Macbeth does not know who the Witches are or how much they can tell him : hence his subsequent enquiries (see 1. 5. 1-3). He himself, coming straight from the battle, knows about Cawdor what the Witches, if mere mortals, are not likely to know ; *So he*

feigns ignorance to test their knowledge and perhaps spur them to say something more about the greater prophecy of kingship."

Well and good. But what about nearly the very same question of Macbeth in response to Ross's greeting? Here is the question:

"The thane of Cawdor lives : why do you dress me
In borrow'd robes" ? Act I. Sc. 3 ll. 109-110.

Is it not strange that Macbeth who "must have known that Cawdor was a captured rebel" puts such a question to Ross who also must have been aware of all about "that most disloyal traitor," sent as he was from the field of battle to make report of the victory and the treason. Are we to believe that Macbeth is jocose here and "*feigns ignorance*" only to outwit the "worthy thane of Ross ? The editor cautiously and wisely keeps here studied silence. His evasive reticence only discloses his inability to explain, or rather reveals the weak point of his defense. His emphatic assertions are belied by the immediately succeeding speech of Augus, the manner of which shows, beyond doubt, that it is meant to enlighten Macbeth on the point. Again, if Macbeth, and Banquo too, "must have known that Cawdor was a captured rebel," it is to be naturally expected that their conversation, immediately

after the vanishing of the witches, should have been on the probability of the transference of the thaneship about which the Weird Sisters predicted. But their colloquy does not turn that way. The trend of the dialogue, especially "And thane of Cawdor too" seems to show that they were quite in the dark as to Cawdor's treachery. And that must be the author's intention. For their knowledge of Cawdor being a captured rebel would render it all the more difficult for Shakespeare to attach to the transference of the title a sense of impossibility, which he needs must do to avoid the charge of unnaturalness.

Deighton who takes just the opposite view says:—"Shakespeare has here been charged with an inconsistency in making Macbeth speak in these terms of one who in Sc 2 II 52, 3 is said to have 'assited' the king of Norway. I have already pointed out that the word 'assisted' does not at all necessarily imply assistance in person; and it is quite possible that Macbeth having left the field of battle, as soon as it was over to proceed to Forres, and not having yet joined the king, was ignorant of Cawdor's treachery and of the sentence passed upon him. If so there is nothing strange in his speaking of that thane as

a "prosperous gentleman." That Cawdor's defection was the result of sudden impulse may, I think, be inferred from Duncan's surprise when informed of it by Ross; and that the exact facts were not generally known is shown by the words of Angus ll 111-14, though he, as Ross's companion might be presumed to have heard them so far as they had been ascertained. Shakespeare nowhere states that Cawdor had taken part in the battle."

Of course Deighton's opinion seems to be the more reasonable of the two. Yet, his explanation too is not quite convincing. Macbeth, the Commander-in-chief, being the supreme military authority should have been the first to have knowledge of Cawdor's defection. He, and not the king, ought to have been first informed of the traitor, that he might take necessary precautions to guard against emergencies. If it was possible for the sergeant to guess at somebody's foul play and give expression to it in "new supplies of men," Act I Sc 2 ll 32, in the note on which the editor also notices "referring, no doubt to the supplies sent by Cawdor," it surely passes our comprehension why the highest authority had no information about it. Furthermore, "that Cawdor's defection

“was the result of sudden impulse” cannot be inferred from the king’s declaration, Act I Sc 2 ll. 63-5, quoted above. It does, in no way, show any sign of his being taken by surprise. Rather the contrary may, we think, be inferred from Angus’s doubtful surmise, to which the editor also lends his support when he in his note on “assisted” Act I Sc 2 ll 53, says : “who (Cawdor) is also said to have strengthened the rebel Macdonwald ‘With hidden help and vantage.’” But “the result of sudden impulse” or of deliberation, why should not the defection be first reported to Macbeth ? If it is admitted for the sake of argument that Macbeth, having not a moment’s respite, heavily engaged as he was in the thickest of the fight, could not any how be informed of the startling disclosure of Cawdor’s disloyalty, why should we believe him to have “left the field of battle *as soon as it was over* to proceed to Forres” ? Was this unexpected slipping away post-haste, leaving things at sixes and sevens, in obedience to an urgent call from His Majesty ? for nothing short of that could justify his behaving like that. Certainly that was not the case. Then why ? There is no answer. Simply beating the enemy is not surely the duty of the Generalissimo. He must

have to do something else. Before retiring to the camp he must settle with the vanquished foe suing for peace. Now, we ask who was responsible for Ross's words :

"That now

Sweno, the Norway's king, craves composition ;
 Nor would we deign him burial of his men
 Till he disbursed at Saint Colme's inch
 Ten thousand dollars to our general use" ? Act I Sc 2 ll 60-63

Certainly that could not be done without the presence and sanction of Macbeth. If so, he could not "leave the field of battle as soon as it was over" and so then at least, if not before, he could be informed of all about Cawdor.

Again, if Cawdor "assisted" *not* 'in person' how could he be so easily arrested and so shortly executed ? That is why, we suppose, Verity so emphatically asserts, "Macbeth must have known that Cawdor was a captured rebel." But as the text offers no conclusive proof such an assertion must be characterized as too bold. In fact, the hasty execution is responsible for all these controversies.

Thus we see both the views lack logical soundness, as their directly contrary nature presupposes that they must. So we cannot but concur with those who justly accuse here Shakespeare

of real inconsistency. And this, we must say, is the inevitable consequence of prevarication. For to the average man it will appear that the author seems very studiously careful not to make the point sufficiently clear; and Macbeth's ambiguous enquiry about Cawdor lends colour to that suspicion. We say ambiguous because it may mean that Macbeth is quite in the dark as to the story of Cawdors defection, or it may imply that he knows the treason but not the extent of the penalty. In any case, he has no reason to consider the transference of the title-impossible and couple it with the "all hail hereafter" He muses :

"And to be king
Stands not within the prospect of belief,
No more than to be Cawdor."

A thaneship is not so exalted and important a position as that of the king who can himself make or mar it at his own sweet will. We have said the question is serious, and we shall try to show to what extent it is so. In fact, it is the very pivot whereon turns the whole plot of the play. Shakespeare knows the weak point and flimsy basis upon which to erect the heavy superstructure. So he, the last man to make an unnecessary repetition, puts in the mouth of

Macbeth the same question twice, and that in a single Scene. Further, when Banquo, in reply to Macbeth pointing out to him that his children shall be kings very significantly retorts laying stress on the first word : “ *You* shall be king.” Macbeth corrects him and readily adds. “ And thane of Cawdor too,” as though to be Cawdor were a greater honour than to be king ! Thus we clearly perceive how anxiously does Shakespeare seek to attach undue importance to this transfer of the title, thane of Cawdor, to give it an air of sheer impossibility—an air which hardly bears scrutiny. And why ? Because when Macbeth sees that one impossible has been made possible, it is but natural that his credulous heart hopefully bounds up to cling to “ the greatest that is behind.” He may think, “ Now that I am Cowdor, a situation that seemed impossible, I can reasonably expect that the other seeming impossibility will soon be within easy reach, and king I must be.” Here the question is distinctly one of possibility and impossibility. Had Macbeth thought the one possible and the other impossible and still hoped and believed that the impossible also would come to be true, he would then seem unnaturally credulous, indeed ! A possible truth does not sway the mind so strongly as an impossible

truth. It is like the quicksand whereon the idea of the impossible being made possible cannot have firm footing. But we have seen that to be Cowdor is not at all impossible, try howsoever Shakespeare may to make it appear as such. Thus to guard against one impropriety he has exposed himself to the charge of another.

THE REGICIDE.

Possible or impossible, the verification of the Cawdor-prophecy, may, at most, let Macbeth fervently hope, nay, surely expect, that some day he shall be crowned king of Scotland. The "all-hail"-prediction does in no way suggest the way of its being verified. Why then must the monstrous idea of committing regicide be the very first to strike him? To become king by murdering the king does not require prophetic help. The fore-telling is very likely to dissuade from and not, at all, to persuade to the perpetration of the flagitious crime. If there lurks in the remotest corner of the mind the appalling idea of shedding the royal blood, the firm belief in the prophetic truth will rather help to quench that smouldering desire than fan it to flame. For, when I am perfectly certain that king I must be, try or not, why should I purposely

subject myself to “horrible imaginings”? I should rather feel a relief that I am spared the commission of an extremely obnoxious felony. Thus the idea of slaughtering the king is hardly reconcilable, especially, with the character of Macbeth.

It is to be expected that the wife, the partner of the bed, knows the husband best. And if that wife be no other than Lady Macbeth herself, we can safely depend upon her estimate. Here is her testimony: Act I Sc. 5 ll 14-19.

“yet, do I fear thy nature ;

It is too full o’ the milk of human kindness

To catch the nearest way : thou wouldest be great ;

Art not without ambition, but without

The illness should attend it ; what thou wouldest highly

That wouldest thou holily ; wouldest not play false.”

This is, indeed, the picture of the magnanimous heart that should dwell under the bosom of a noble, large-minded general. And the majestic appearance of “Bellona’s Bridegroom” seemed to bear such a heart, till Ross and Angus come foward to great him with “new honours ;” and, all of sudden, he is completely metamorphosed. Lady Macbeth’s carefully weighed words are thrown overboard. Her apprehension is falsified ; and in vain do we search for even a

drop of that "milk of human kindness" of which he was believed to be "too full." He does "catch the nearest way."

This is abundantly clear from his own confession :

"Why do I yield to that suggestion
Whose horrid image doth unfix my hair
And make my seated heart knock at my ribs,
Against the use of nature?" Act I Sc 3 ll 34-37

He does not stop there. He won't leave us beating about the bush. Blockheads that we are, we may not understand that 'Suggestion' and be groping in the dark. So he puts it more plainly :

"My thought whose murder yet is but fantastical,
Shakes so my single state of man that function
Is smothered in surmise, and nothing is
But what is not". ll 39-42

But why all these "horrible imaginings" and terrible heart-burnings? If he is thane of Cawdor without having to stain his hand and honour, why can he not rest assured that the third prophecy shall likewise be fulfilled? Instead of brooding over the nefarious idea of snatching the crown with quaking hands, reddened with the purest blood of his most gracious and grateful king, not without consanguinity, why does

he not leave the "imperial theme" to materialize in due course of time? What he is compelled to do latterly, being wholly non-plussed, why did he not do that at the very outset—

"If chance will have me king, why, chance may crown me
Without my stir" ? ll 43-44

But yet, he does not rest long in this resigning mood, as his 'aside' in the next scene clearly reveals. Does not so abrupt a transformation smack of the unnatural? Shakespeare knows that as plainly as anybody else. So he introduces the supernatural element, by way of justification of such an inconceivably headlong fall. But we have seen how the natural pushes the supernatural to the corner, nay, out of the arena !

Some reviewers are of opinion that Lady Macbeth's speech, Act I Sc. 7 ll 47-57.

"What beast was it then
That made you break this enterprise to me?" etc.

clearly hints that the idea of murdering Duncan was a preconceived one ; or, in other words, Macbeth contemplated this heinous crime of regicide before his meeting with the witches. But the word 'enterprise' here, may be interpreted as the height of his ambition and not the way to reach it. Looking through their glasses,

however, does not save the situation. That is rather landing on a treacherous ground. In the first place, such an idea, as we have observed above, ought to be smothered under the crushing weight of firm belief. Secondly, the author is not acquitted of the charge of inconsistency. For, then Macbeth's character will not at all correspond to what his wife thinks of him. Thirdly, the man—if there really exists such a man—who can win the “Golden opinion of all sorts of people” without letting anybody suspect his double-dealings, is not certainly the vacillating, weak-minded Macbeth. Lastly, the pointed necessity of the supernatural intervention is rendered wholly useless.

The question of this capital crime having been settled, the next difficulty is how to devise a way out. Why, that seems quite easy to the fertile brain of Lady Macbeth who unhesitatingly suggests :

“what not put upon
His spongy officers, who shall bear the guilt
Of our great quell ?” Act. I Sc. 7 ll 70-72

Macbeth does not argue the wisdom of laying the blame at the door of the chamberlains “That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep” who, having so long been faithful, could have no

possible reason to suddenly turn traitors. He only asks, Will it not be received? thereby himself admitting that it will. We leave off accusing Macbeth, seeing him utterly incapable of the use of reason—so hopelessly changed he is! But how can that artful woman, so shrewd and designing—who gives such excellent proofs of her wonderful presence of mind at the murder scene and at the banquet scene—how can this woman of uncommon abilities bring herself to believe that such a transfer of the guilt is possible? It is latterly opined that the grooms were suborned. But suborned or not, what fool of a murderer is there who will wait or loiter about, bearing eloquent marks of the bloody deed on his person, only to prove, beyond doubt, his own guilt? He will rather quickly follow her own advice to Macbeth and “wash the filthy witness from his hands.” No man can be so obtuse as to allow himself to be led by the nose, and believe every letter of whatever is urged. If an assassin stands red-handed, only to be caught, we have good reasons to believe that he has already said good-bye to his bloody profession and contemplates leading the life of a hermit. Indeed, to make fools of others the over-crafty woman has befooled herself. The penetrating eye of

Lennox who has shown himself a very keen observer in Act I Sc. 2, sees through the too-transparent concealing ; and his ready response to Malcolm's question very cunningly insinuates that to make scape-goats of the two innocent grooms Lady Macbeth has only committed herself. Here is what Lennox says :—

“Those of his chamber, as it seem'd had done't :
Their hands and faces were all badged with blood ;
So were their daggers, which unwiped we find
Upon their pillows :
They stared, and were distracted ; no man's life
Was to be trusted with them.” Act 1 Sc II 225-30

These are proofs, forsooth ! The undertone of a grim humour is not it all hard to catch. Lennox only reproduces what Macbeth said as he “did kill them” in his presence. Macduff also adopts exactly the same safest course when he replies to Ross's question in Act II Sc 2 ll 24-27 (quoted below). The grooms in all probability were still asleep, when Macduff first entered the rooms, also when Macbeth and Lennox rushed in as they heard Macduff raising an alarm. This we can gather from another speech of Lennox, quoted below, in which he says in part “That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep.” Furthermore, Macduff's question “where-

fore did you so", Act II Sc 1, ll 232 lends colour to this view and bespeaks his strong suspicion.

Now if Shakespeare, on the face of his own testimony, given in Act I Sc 2, means to convey by this speech of Lennox, that he, of all men, must be the very first to be so cozened as to believe it, we must be constrained to remark, "Inconsistency, thy name is Shakespeare"! For, we hear him again unsay his words in Act III Sc 6, where Lennox, in an ironical vein, and with very little reserve, declares his honest views to another lord. He observes :

"How it did grieve Macbeth ! Did he not straight
In pious rage the two delinquents tear,
That were the slaves of drink and thralls of sleep ?
Was not that nobly done ? Ay, and wisely too ;
For 'twould have anger'd any heart alive
To hear the men deny't. So that, I say,
He has borne all things well : and I do think
That had he Duncan's sons under his key—
As, an't please heaven he shall not—they should find
What 'twere to kill a father ; so should Fleance."

In would be a very poor defence, no doubt, and also gross injustice to Lady Macbeth to say that Shakespeare wants to show that the genius is, after all, only a silly woman. She can 'unsex' herself but wofully fails to concoct a plot that can

bear even the casual glance of flimsy suspicion, not to speak of the severest scrutiny of certainty ! The incident must be the most serious imaginable. It is to decide, once for all, their fate : and on the way, in which they manage it, depends, whether crown or scaffold is to be their lot. Hence to show the failing of a genius at such a psychological moment is, doubtless, exhibiting one's own incapacity.

Granting, however, for argument's sake, the extreme view that even geniuses can afford to fail so miserably and ludicrously, there is no justification whatever for the ridiculous findings of the Investigation Commission. We learn from Macduff :

“They were suborn'd :
Malcolm and Donalbain, the king's two sons,
Are stol'n away and fled ; which puts upon them
Suspicion of the deed.” Act II Sc. 2 ll 24-26.

We have criticised above the possibility of the grooms' doing “this more than bloody deed.” As for the two young princes, Malcolm was only that day installed the Prince of Cumberland or Crown-Prince. And as the idea of two sovereigns simultaneously reigning over the same land was absurd, and that of wearing the crown superseding his elder brother was any-

thing but possible, Donalbain could have no reason to be party to the crime which promised him no chance whatever. Again how could, and why did, the young boys, if they were the real culprits, venture to wait till the murder was announced, instead of slipping away immediately after its perpetration ? Furthermore, who would entertain the foolish idea that the sons, having suborned the grooms to slay their aged father, fled away only to allow somebody else to profit by their parricide ?

Indeed, these were reasons, broad and cogent enough to strike even the man in the street. Thus Macbeth's futile attempt to arraign the panick-stricken princes seemed like that of a drowning man to catch at a straw. But how could Banquo, Macduff, Lennox and others honestly subscribe to this view ? Could the host and hostess's "griefs and clamour roaring upon his death" so hopelessly outwit them ? Or, are we to believe that they, cowering under their frowning looks dared not contradict them ? Where was their much-vaunted pledge that bound them to "fight of treasonous malice" ? Could they eat up their words so soon and make so lamentable a summersault. That they were death-sure as to who the real delinquent was, was quite clear from

their subsequent admissions. Banquo said in his soliloquy "Thou play'dst most foully for't". Lennox's ironical view is quoted above already. And Macduff declared his opinion by his speedy flight. Now, if these valiant and honourable Scottish Chiefs could so easily be terrorised into stammering out only dittos or nodding their assent to any and every word, why did Macbeth, who burning with ambitious jealousy gnashed his teeth at Malcolm and imprecatingly said in his *aside* :

"The Prince of Cumberland ! that is a step
On which I must fall down, or else o'erleap,
For in my way it lies." Act I Sc 4 ll 48-50

—let go the god-sent opportunity of eradicating the obstacles ? Getting the princes completely within the hollow of his palm why did he foolishly allow himself to be given the slip ? In fact, Macbeth's allowing the Prince of Cumberland to slip out of his hands, and the attitude of the Scottish nobility can hardly be reconciled. If we suppose Macbeth did not put the prince to death —which, doubtless, he should have done to make the coast clear, simply fearing that the guilt would be too huge to be swallowed with one gulp and easily digested, then the apparent intimidation of the Scotch nobles becomes wholly incon-

sistent. For it belies that supposition. On the other hand, if we try to justify the shameful conduct of the nobles on the ground, real or imaginary, that Macbeth being then the most powerful Chieftain, nobody ventured to question him, we cannot account for his not doing away with the heir-apparent. Thus we see, any way, the case is indefensible. The rag is too short for both the head and the back : to cover one the other is uncomfortably exposed !

We know, for certain, that Macbeth and his wife badly want to get rid of the Prince of Cumberland whom they think, and think rightly, to be a thorn on their way to the throne. Inordinate ambition demands that they must catch the very first opportunity to root out the thorn. A bird in the hand is worth two, why two, twenty or two hundred in the bush. Opportunities are not plentiful like black-berries. They are rare, very rare, indeed, in the life of a man. So it would be foolish for that unparalleled woman, Lady Macbeth, not to arrange for the murder of both the King and the Crown-Prince. History abounds with like instances. The cases of Richard III of England and Aurangzeb, the Mogul Emperor are in point. And if what is true for individuals is equally true for nations, the

massacre of the Czar and his family by Soviet Russia may also be cited here. Even Shakespeare's Antonio in *The Tempest* did not forget to take care that the infant Miranda should also be sent out to exile with her father, Prospero. We say Lady Macbeth because it is she who is the guiding spirit; her husband is only a tool in her hands. But the question is: How to effect this purpose? If the plot is a little more skilfully handled we think the situation can be saved without even having to mar the tremendous effect of the Murder-Scene. Now killing Malcolm would be a flagrant deviation from history, which may be regarded as unpardonable. But this difficulty, insurmountable though it appears to be, can easily be got over by making Malcolm *the younger* of the two brothers. Lady Macbeth's plan should be to assassinate the king and Donalbain who, according to *the new suggestion*, is the Prince of Cumberland. With this end in view the grooms and the fated ones are to be drugged, and the two princes are to be made to sleep in the two rooms on either side of the State-chamber which must have at least one door on each side leading into those rooms. But Macbeth's mind is not strong enough to be surely

relied upon. He is hopelessly incapable of committing two secret murders in quick succession. So Lady Macbeth who thoroughly knows the weak points of her husband's nature does not trust him with this double charge. She resolves to bear the knife herself to kill Donalbain, the Crown-Prince. That she is more than equal to the task is quite evident from her own words :

"I have given suck and know
How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me :
I would, while it was smiling in my face
Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums,
And dash'd the brains out, had I so sworn as you
Have done to this" Act.I Sc. 7 ll 54-59

Do they not carry conviction ? If not, if these are considered as mere vaunting words, we quote from her soliloquy :

"Had he not resembled
My father as he slept, I had done't." Act II Sc 1 ll 76-77

But Donalbain is not the babe that milks her and smiles in her face, nor does he bear any resemblance to her father to hold her back.

She keeps this secret design even from Macbeth, lest he should be frightened into failing to execute the task assigned to him. She only darkly hints, preferably in an *aside*,

that she broods over doing something else and thus leaves the audience in suspense. She thinks of finishing it when Macbeth gets back after killing the king. An excellent opportunity is given her when she sees Macbeth return foolishly carrying the dagger with him. Chiding him for his fear and infirmity she goes to replace the dagger, kills Donalbain and removes the body to the threshold of the State-chamber. Thus doing everything to her satisfaction she comes back to Macbeth and says *more significantly* :

“My hands are of your colour ; but I shame
To wear a heart so white.” Act II Sc 1 ll 128-129

—and makes known what she has done. When they are so engaged in conversation, the grooms are roused from their sleep, possibly by the vigorous and repeated “*knocking within*”. They are horror-struck to see the dreadful sight. They tap on the door of Malcolm who sleeps in the next room. Malcolm, already awaked, hears the tapping. He opens the door and is a-gape to see the bleeding corpses of his father and brother. In blank dismay he looks at the one and at the other. They whisper together. The grooms, who clearly see, any how they are done for, convince Malcolm that he is surely meant to be the chief delinquent, and as for themselves,

they are suborned. Fly or not, the charge must be there. But in fleeing the country there is one saving grace. They will not only *not* forfeit their lives but have yet a chance to establish their innocence. But alas, the "*knocking within!*" There is no flying they think. They are undone. Fortunately, Malcolm recollects the secret backdoor which he came to know on a former visit with his brother and they lose no time to make good their escape

"The guilt of the great quell" was originally meant to be transferred to the grooms who, it was to be given out, killed the king in a fit of drunken madness, the natural outcome of an excess of wine on the occasion of the Victory-celebration. Donalbain, possibly hearing a groan rushed into his father's chamber and was stabbed at the doorway by the distracted grooms. The bloody deed might disinebriate them. Fly they could not. The secret back-door was known only to the princes and not to them. The front gate was securely fastened and locked from inside (if there was not the cumbrous system of the portcullis and the draw-bridge as is generally found to be the case with the castles of those good old days—the Norham castle in Scott's *Marmion* may be cited as an example).

If they were found asleep in consequence of the drug, that might be interpreted as a mere feigning to shift the incidence of the guilt.

But the flight of Malcolm and the grooms lends a different colour to the situation. On investigation it is to be opined that Malcolm, seeing his hopes shattered that morning by the unexpected nomination of Donalbain as the Prince of Cumberland, gets infuriated with ire and jealousy. He desperately seizes the opportunity of throwing the guilt on the shoulder of Macbeth, conspires with the grooms and does this nefarious deed to wreak vengeance not without the hope of wearing the crown. Their flight to England is primarily to get themselves at a safe distance, for who knows what turn things may take. Besides, it is a pretence of fear, cunningly devised to prove their innocence.

Treating the plot in this way, we think, Shakespeare could have avoided the above discrepancies and absurdities and, at the same time, done greater justice to the genius of Lady Macbeth and also to the fitness of things.

We cannot help noticing here, in this connection two other improprieties—for so they appear to us—namely, (a) the imaginary dagger and (b) the attitude of the drugged grooms.

(a) The airy dagger—no doubt, a beautiful creation—loses much of its flavour from the question naturally arising in the mind : Is it possible for Macbeth who has shown himself quite a normal man in the just preceding conversation with Banquo—where he has betrayed no sign of his “heat-oppressed brain”, as he did the day before to see, to his great amazement, two of the predictions so wonderfully verified, where we have rather seen him very coolly make, like an expert man of business, a wise engagement of great self-interest—is it possible for such a man to see a phantasm immediately after sending away his servant, without even forgetting to cautiously order him, “Get thee to bed”? To enable the readers to judge for themselves we beg to be excused for quoting the colloquy *in extenso*

The Second Act opens the court of Macbeth’s castle to our view. *Enter Banquo, and Fleance bearing a torch before him.* They exchange a few words—which do not concern us—when *enter Macbeth and a servent with a torch.* Banquo, unable to recognise from a distance, enquires : Who’s there ? Macbeth responds : A friend.

B. What, sir, not yet at rest ? The king’s abed :
He hath been in unusual pleasure, and

Sent forth great largess to your offices.
 This diamond he greets your wife withal,
 By the name of most kind hostess ; and shut up
 In measureless content.

M. Being unprepared,
 Our will became the servant to defect ;
 Which else should free have wrought.

B. All's well ;
 I dreamt last night of the three weird sisters :
 To you they have show'd some truth.

M. I think not of them :
 Yet when we can entreat an hour to serve
 I would spend it in some words upon that business,
 If you would grant the time

B. At your kind'st leisure.
 M. If you shall cleave to my consent when 'tis
 It shall make honour for you.

[Here, indeed, he foolishly betrays himself to Banquo to whom everything becomes clear as daylight, when the murder is announced only a few hours later.]

B. So lose I none
 In seeking to augment it, but still keep
 My bosom franchised and allegiance clear,
 I shall be counsell'd.

M. Good repose the while !

B. Thanks, sir : the like to you !

[*Exeunt Banquo and Fleance*]

M. Go bid thy mistress, when my drink is ready,
She strike upon the bell. Get thee to bed.

[*Exit servant.*]

Is this a dagger which I see before me,
The handle toward my hand? etc etc

Is it natural that a mind, so pre-occupied, sees a phantasy? The evidence of Psychology is against it. Macbeth ought to have been allowed sometime to be all by himself—to become wholly engrossed with the concentrated thought of the "bloody business". Then, *and not till then*, the hallucination might be a possible consequence. Maybe, Macbeth is to pause a while after dismissing the servant. But it must take him long, very long time, indeed, to efface from his mind the almost indelible and troubling impressions, left by Banquo whom he badly wants to "cleave to his consent." Besides, there are others. Thus, we fear, the pause, to be compatible, must be long enough to create an awkward situation. Consider the case of Luther throwing his inkpot at the phantom Devil. The zealous reformer was all along by himself, and yet, not himself, being absorbed in a profound reverie.

(b) The attitude of the grooms at the time of the murder is rather questionable. They were

plied with drinks, nay, even drugged. How was it then that they did not sleep as senseless as they possibly should ? We hear :

"There's one did laugh in's sleep, and one cried,
"Murder !"

That they did wake each other : I stood and heard them:
But they did say their prayers, and address'd them
Again to sleep. Act II Sc 1 ll 87-89

* * * * *

* * * * *

One cried, 'God bless us !' and 'Amen' the other.

Whatever might be the subjects of their dreams, this much was quite certain that the theme of murder must have been in the minds of both when they awoke. For, one certainly dreamed of murder, and the other was roused by the cry of murder. And it was the uneasy thought of murder that led them to say their prayer. So far so good. But why did they "address them again to sleep" ? They were in charge of the safety of the royal person—a very responsible charge, to be sure ! They were roused with the theme of murder troubling their minds, and against this murder they were to be on their guard. Was it then possible for them to go to sleep again, before being quite sure that all was right ? It may be said, they

were only half-awake being still under the somnific influence of the drug. If the influence could be so easily made to slacken its hold to waken them from sleep, the horrific thought of murder—not an ordinary thought—must have been strong enough to dispel the already yielding influence altogether.

It would have been an admirable stroke of dramatic art, if Macbeth stopped at “Murder”—thereby giving an inkling into his mind, wrought up to the highest pitch. Macbeth, in his fevered brain, might well seem to hear his own thought echoed. The laughing of the one could then be construed as being a grim echo of the pitiful laughing of the knowing Conscience, and the cry of murder of the other might, as well, be interpreted as the seeming cry of an imaginary detecting eye—which a trembling, guilty mind fears to hear every moment—raising an alarm ! And this again would have been quite in a line with his hearing—

“Sleep no more ! Macbeth does murder sleep.”

Act II Sc. i ll 100

SOME STRIKING POINTS.

There are several striking points of disagreement, and we shall touch only a few of them.

1. Act. I Sc. 6 :—We see, Lady Macbeth alone receives His Majesty. The host is rather very conspicuous by his absence. We feel tempted to join our voice with the royal guest and ask :

“Where's the thane of Cawdor ?”

Are we to understand that the neophyte in the art of simulation has yet to rehearse and master his part to be able to “look like the innocent flower, But be the serpent under it” ? But he was seen before to have acquitted himself quite creditably when he was received by the king.

2. The Third Act opens a new drama, as it were. With the Second Act goes all the interest that rose to climax at the murder scene, and has since begun to flag. Thus we notice a break of interest, the continuity of which must be vitally important in a drama. We have, up till now, been watching the fulfilment of the third prophecy, “the swelling act of the imperial theme”. That is really the point of interest. In fact, the interest of the whole drama centres on the predictions. Thus when we have witnessed the assassination of Banquo and the hair-breadth escape of Fleance, which offers ample evidence that the witches' words to Banquo are sure to come true; all our interest is gone, and we do not

know what more to expect. Shakespeare also knows this. So he tries to revive the passing interest by sending out Macbeth to visit the weird sisters again. Thus the Supernatural is once more brought into requisition with a view to keeping up the interest through.

3. Act III Sc. 3 :—Mr. Paton and Prof. Baynes independently think that the third murderer, introduced here, is no other than the Royal assassin Macbeth ; and they have advanced long arguments in support of their curious opinion. If that be the case, the representation of the next scene is rendered very difficult. For, Macbeth who is the very first person to speak there has to transform himself from the red-handed cut-throat to His Imperial Majesty—a change of dress, to be effected not very shortly, nor easily. Further, the manner of Macbeth's speech is in itself an argument, strong enough to disprove the theory.

4. Act III Sc. 4. :—The appearance of the murderer of Banquo at the door of the banquet-hall, bearing prominent marks of "blood upon his face", is against all propriety. How is it possible for him to enter the castle, unseen and to come straight to the hall where "the country's honour is roof'd", especially, when

the whole castle is alive with the royal entertainment ?

Again, in the Stage-direction we see : “*The ghost of Banquo enters, and sits in Macbeth's place : ghost vanishes : Re-enter ghost : ghost vanishes.*” How is this to be represented ? The audience will see the ghost, as it is directed to enter the stage ; while those on the stage will not, as is required by the prevailing circumstances. The ghost of Hamlet's father is a real character of that play. The audience hear him unfold a tale and say many things else. But here Banquo's ghost is only a dumb-show. The dramatic genius of Shakespeare would do well to treat it as another hallucination of the imaginative Macbeth.

5. Act IV Sc. 3 :—When the test of Macduff is over, ‘*enter a doctor*’ a veritable intruder, whose conversation with Malcolm has no—not even the remotest—bearing on the plot. We are told, this introduction of the healing power of English sovereigns is by way of the author's special compliment to James I of England. We have heard of Queen Victoria honouring Charles Dickens—her literary superior. But here we see Shakespeare, a greater genius, complimenting the “Wisest Fool in Christendom”—and that at

the cost of dramatic propriety. If he can not manage that dramatically, he should well despair of the idea. Such whimsical digression is to be seriously reprehended in a drama.

6. Act V Sc. 1 :—Here is another doctor, wisely giving out his view of Somnambulism : “A perturbation in nature, to receive at once the benefit of sleep, and do the effects of watching.” The physician in charge of the treatment of the Queen of Scotland is expected to be the most eminent, then available. But what do we see here ? The doctor who believes that “the benefit of sleep” is received in Somnambulism, must be an arrant impostor ! Bucknill, in his *Mad Folk of Shakespeare* holds the same opinion. He says : “In this slumbery agitation the benefit of sleep cannot be received, as the doctor thinks. It neither exerts its soothing effect on the mind, nor is it ‘chief nourisher in life’s feast, to the body.’” Shall we understand that the Galens of Caledonia having boycotted the tyrant, he has no other way than to call in this quack ? But we forget the license of the Doctor of Imagination is far more powerful than that of the Doctor of Medicine !

7. Act V Sc. 3 :—It is really a treat to see Macbeth, at bay, still in possession of an

inexhaustible fund of imagination. He describes the servant who informs him of the strength of the enemy, as bearing a 'cream face,' nay, a 'whey face,' 'goose-looks', a 'lily liver' and 'linen cheeks.' In short, Macbeth sees in the light of his fiery imagination (which also serves the purpose of X-rays,) that the coward stands before him completely white-washed, in and out ! This hunting the vocabulary to cull choice expressions to convey the correct idea of whiteness, at such a critical moment, is, indeed, a great feat of 'fine frenzy'

We may notice here in this connection that *Macbeth* is not very rich in Rhetoric. In fact, this is a deficiency from which the whole English language conspicuously suffers. Milton has, however, laboured to make the most of this poor homely beauty. But he pales into insignificance before the brilliant majesty of Kalidas.

8. The plays of Shakespeare have been classified as Comedies, Tragedies and Romances ; and eminent critics have been pleased to call *Macbeth* a tragedy. Now, what is a tragedy ? Is it a play that ends in the death of the hero or the heroine or of both, be they angels or villains ? Or, is it one that closes in such a manner that the melancholy situation creates a

compelling force, filling our heart to the brim, nay, to overflowing, with pity and sympathy, that we feel the wringing grip of lingering grief so take hold of us that we cannot help heaving a heavy sigh, and possibly shedding tears, as we see the curtain fall or close the book, wishing in our heart of hearts that such things never were? Doubtless, a tragedy of the highest order can be created without having to resort to the death or the murder. The essence of a tragedy mainly consists in that it keeps the audience or readers in anxious and continued suspense in consequence of overflowing sympathy, and in ending sorrowfully, upsetting all forecasts.

Romeo and Juliet is a tragedy, because our heart goes in full sympathy with the passionate young lovers. The tragic situation palpably originates in the cruel exile of Romeo and culminates in the melancholy death of both. So is also *Hamlet* where the tragic germ is unmistakably born of the sad death of the pitiable insane Ophelia and develops into a full tragedy at the lamentable end of the delaying hero. In *King Lear* the tragic element is from the very outset, where Cordelia is unjustly disinherited ; and the effect is highly intensified by her unexpected hanging and the death of the distracted father,

consequent upon it. In *Othello* we can hardly bear to see the giant Moor, burning with imaginary jealousy, smother the tiny rose-life of the spotless Desdemona out of her slender frame, and the high-strung situation, created by the repentant lover who, coming to know his grievous blunder but too late, with the sure grip of death upon his throat, makes a last effort to draw closer to kiss off the pallor of death from the still sweet face of his heart's embodied joy, the fair Desdemona ! These are real tragedies. For, who could believe or expect that things would come to such harrowing endings ? But what do we find in *Macbeth* ? Duncan is murdered, Banquo is assassinated, the Macduffs are massacred, Lady Macbeth dies, possibly commits suicide, and lastly, Macbeth is slain in the battle. But none of this series of melodramatic events creates a really tragic situation. In the case of the first two, much of the tragic effect is lost by reason of the preconception and the contrivances that precede the happenings. The back ground of the third is so unskilfully handled that the expected effect cannot be produced ; and this is all the more marred by the questionable informing beforehand of the surprisal by the intruding messenger who has no business to

intervene. While in the case of the last two we behold the retributive hand of Nemesis rather with stern satisfaction, though much lessened in the case of Lady Macbeth for inadequacy, than with a feeling of tragic emotion.

But if the unmistakable change that was seen to come upon Macbeth, freed from the iron influence of his infernal queen, instead of being ephemeral, would gradually gather strength, if his renunciation would, by degrees, stand out in clear relief, if the sense of the accumulated guilt could generate in him such a measure of moral courage as might embolden him to submit unreservedly to, not in any way to fall back from, as he actually did, but to gladly welcome, the tortures and torments, be they ever so excruciating,—if the agonising remorse could so chasten his guilty heart as to make him burst out, in reply to Macduff's horrifying words of punishment, in accents like these : "That is not enough ! That falls far—far short of what I really deserve ! The punishment that you mean to inflict upon me is only a pin-prick—is nothing compared with the unparalleled misdeeds committed by this hard-hearted tyrant. I fear, Flesh can make but poor amends for the mountain-high sins of the Spirit. O, how fervently

I wish the most terrible physical punishment, man can devise, could purge me of the sins that hang heavy upon my unhappy soul!"—then the surging sympathy that would surely have been awakened in us could have turned our feelings of bitter hatred into those of warm admiration, compelling us to forget the horrid remembrances! Then the joint revenge of Malcolm and Macduff could create a truly tense situation of high tragic value, if tragedy must have been the author's craze. But still higher would the creation decidedly rise, if the *suggested* saving change of Macbeth could, as it should, turn the cruel murderous spirit of vengeance of the Prince and the Thane into the merciful and divine one of forgive-and-forget, thereby making them shine with the resplendent splendour of celestial glory! Such a reclamation as this may not strike the imagination of the Poets of the materialistic West. But to Orientals this is not at all impossible or unnatural. For, in our history such striking instances are not very rare.

Thus we see, *Macbeth* is not a tragedy in the strictest sense of the word—at least, according to our conception of it. We can define it only negatively—It is not a Comedy, it is not a

Tragedy, it is not a Romance. It is a non-descript.

SOME OF THE SPEECHES.

Next we shall comment on some of the speeches which do not seem very commendable and therefore easily lend themselves to criticism.

i. "Doubtful it stood."

Act 1 Sc. 2. ll 7

Malcolm calls upon the sergeant to relate the news of the battle, saying :

"Hail brave friend !
Say to the king the knowledge of the broil
As thou didst leave it".

"Doubtful it stood" begins the sergeant without any ceremony, though he knows and is also reminded by the prince that he speaks before the king. That he is waiting there for the king to make his report clearly shows that he is not breathless with tire and emotion, as may be the case with Ross who comes following close upon his heels ; and yet even *he* does not forget to hail, "God save the King." Further, his bombast and tinsel proves that he is not a blunt soldier. We do not like to say anything about the simile of the two spent swimmers, for that would be pressing what is already pressed hard.

But we cannot excuse his unbridled tongue when he compares Fortune to a "rebel's whore" in the august presence of His Imperial Majesty. We do not comment on the aptness or otherwise of the simile. But what we want to say is that though he may loosely use his tongue in the company of soldiers of his ilk, he must put a check upon it out of awful deference to aged royalty.

Again from the manner of Malcolm's asking, the sergeant's quick and brief reply, "Doubtful it stood" seems to be to the point; and it is only likely that that was the condition of the battle 'as he did leave it'. For, Ross's coming with the news of final victory demands that it must have seemed indecisive when the sergeant left it. But his details, in no way, point to that. It may be said that "doubtful it stood" refers to a midway condition. But from the nature of the steady progress of the battle which reflects high credit upon "Bellona's Bridegroom" we cannot reasonably infer that it ever stood doubtful.

We ask, in passing, how does Duncan presuppose that the fresh invasion by Norway "dismayed not the captains, Macbeth and Banquo"?

2.

“Now o'er the one-half world
 Nature seems dead, and wicked dreams abuse
 The curtain'd sleep ; witchcraft celebrates
 Pale Hecate's offerings, and wither'd murder
 Alarum'd by his sentinel, the wolf,
 Whose howl's his watch, thus with his stealthy pace,
 With Tarquin's ravishing strides, towards his design
 Moves like a ghost.

Act II Sc. 1. ll 49—56

This poetic effusion comes from Macbeth when he goes to assassinate the royal guest. Does it fit in with the situation ? Does it naturally correspond to his feelings, wrought up to the highest pitch by the “bloody business” in hand ? Can we possibly believe that the “heat-oppressed brain” of Macbeth is capable of such wonderfully minute details ? Macbeth is, no doubt, very often led by his powerful imagination. But its play here, we are sorry to remark, is stretched too far to convince reason. Macbeth's indulging in a nice City-Night-Piece, like that in the Prologue in *Henry V.* when the ‘bloody business’ remains yet to be executed, reminds us of the Brothers in *Comus*, who lose themselves in fine philosophising when the Lady, their blooming sister, has fallen in the hands of the damned necromancer and is about to be violated !

The scientific precision in "o'er the one half Nature", and the undoubted reference to his *Rape of Lucrece* in "Tarquin's ravishing strides"—if not anything else—clearly prove that the dramatist unconsciously betrays himself.

Again, these two are the most ludicrous anachronisms which can hardly be allowed to pass unnoticed. It was in the nineties of the 15th century A. D. that Columbus discovered the antepodes of the Old World. And the spread of Hellenic and Roman literature had not been until 1453, the year which saw the fall of Constantinople in the hands of the Turks, a momentous event that breathed life into the Renaissance. So Macbeth had no chance of knowing either, specially the former. The latter can somehow be conceded in consideration of the priority of the actual historical event.

3

"Better be with the dead,
Whom we, to gain our peace, have sent to peace,
Than on the torture of the mind to lie
In restless ecstasy. Duncan is in his grave ;
After life's fitful fever he sleeps well ;
Treason has done his worst : nor steel, nor poison,
Malice domestic, foreign levy, nothing,
Can touch him further." Act III Sc. 2. ll 19-26

These are magnificent words and are surely worth exciting pity. But when immediately after,

we hear the speaker make known his sinister design to his wife by saying :

“ere the bat hath flown
His cloister'd flight, ere to black Hecate's summons
The shard-borne beetle with his drowsy hums
Hath rung night's yawning peal, there shall be done
A deed of dreadful note.” Act III Sc. 2 ll 40-44

—and when we recollect his immediately preceding secret contract with the assassins, we cannot help observing that these words ill suit in the mouth of the designing bravo. It seems a little unnatural that the person who confesses that he keenly feels the torture of the mind by putting one to death and that he would rather fain “be with the dead” than “lie in restless ecstasy”—would, ere the words are scarcely out of his lips, again take up the knife. Or, are we to understand that Macbeth, swayed by a philanthropic feeling is anxious to send Banquo, his friend, to the grave to relieve him of the miseries of the world—to be sure that “After life's fitful fever *he (too)* sleeps well?” Indeed, this reminds us of the Sentimental Butcher who used to pray every night to expiate the slaughter of animals and forget it as soon as the day broke !

Apropos of the collusion to surprise and slay Banquo and Fleance, we must confess, we

are at a loss to guess what useful purpose, on earth, is served by Macbeth's puerile concealing of the "deed of dreadful note" from Lady Macbeth, his guide and instructress, to whose discerning astuteness this seems but an open secret. For, we know, for certain, that she has come to him with the express wish to talk the identical matter over—the matter which will set their mind at rest about Banquo. This appears quite clearly from her short dialogue with a servant at the very beginning of Act III Sc. 2—where she asks with a feeling of apparent uneasiness, "Is Banquo gone from court?" The reply of the servant, "Ay madam, but returns again to-night", affords her some relief, and she at once sends him to Macbeth, ordering 'say to the king, I would attend his leisure for a few words.' Her subsequent talk with Macbeth betrays this feeling a little more plainly. For when her lord lays bare to her his burning heart by saying: Act III Sc. 2 ll 36-37.

"O, full of scorpions is my mind, dear wife !
Thou know'st that Banquo, and his Fleance lives"
—the "dear wife" at once darkly suggests :
"But in them nature's copy's not eterne."

'Why, then, keep her "innocent of the knowledge" which is already more than revealed

to her,—an almost old piece of news, we may say? Is this show of withholding to save the “dearest chuck” from a rude shock to her tender feminine sensibilities, which, perchance, may again cause her to sink in a swoon and ask, “Help me hence, ho”? “Till thou applaud the deed” will, we suppose, answer the question more eloquently and lucidly than we can.

Are we to understand that Macbeth wishes this time to beat the teacher and thus redeem his character which displayed an unmanly timidity and trepidation, immediately after the regicide, and for which he was so severely reprimanded by his wife’s cuttingly derisive remarks :

“Infirm of purpose! Give me the dagger.”

and

Act II Sc 1 ll 116

“My hands are of your colour, but I shame
To wear a heart so white?” ll 128-29.

4. “Authorized by her grandam” Act III Sc 4 ll 66

This lengthening out is hardly suiting the occasion, the exigency of which demands making as short a business of it as possible. Macbeth has well-nigh revealed himself at the sight of Banquo’s ghost. The cat is half out of the bag, and Lady Macbeth must be uncomfortably busy forcing the cat in. So she can ill afford to indulge in unnecessary garru-

lity. These additional words do not add a jot or tittle to the meaning which is quite sufficiently conveyed already by "A woman's story at a winter's fire."

5. "What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
At one fell swoop?" Act IV Sc 3. ll 218-19

Is Macbeth's imaginativeness catching? For we see Macduff also contracts it. No doubt, the tender love he bears for his wife and children sorely overwhelms him. But we cannot believe him to be capable of making his "grief speak" in Rhetoric. That would very well become a consoling sympathiser who is not smitten himself.

6. "To-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow,
Creeps in this petty pace from day to day
To the last syllable of recorded time,
And our yesterdays have lighted fools
The way to dusty death. Out, out, brief candle!
Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
And then is heard no more: it is a tale
Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
Signifying nothing." Act V Sc 5. ll 19-28

This may be fine poetry, perhaps, the finest piece to be found in the whole play, and is, doubtless, quite in keeping with the abnormally uncanny vein in which it is written. But we regret to remark, it is not enjoyable, because it

embodies a colossal falsehood ! And our heart instinctively recoils from it with a shudder. Of course, this dire pessimism is of a piece with the cynicism of the widower, brought to bay. But the question is : Whether or not we are justified in accepting this as Shakespeare's genuine view of life ? A dramatic author cannot make known his views but through the children of his art. But to judge him through a character like Macbeth—no doubt, a very complex character—is not always safe. Yet, when his imagination is in full play, keeping to the right path, Macbeth is, at times, heard to talk sense and sanity. Now, in the present case had Shakespeare disagreed with the cynical Macbeth, he must have refuted it, of course, dramatically, as he has done in some other cases. For example, Duncan says : Act I Sc 4 ll 11-12.

"There's no art
To find the mind's construction in the face."

Though to this simple-minded king of little worldly experience, despite his age, such an assertion is quite natural, yet no body will deny that it is not true. The author has skilfully repudiated this view of Duncan through the shrewd Lady Macbeth who instructs her husband, saying :

"Your face, my thane, is as a book where men
May read strange matters." Act 1 Sc 5 ll 60-61

But she too cannot be always expected to speak gospel. "The sleep-walking scene", remarks an authority, "is a fine dramatic refutation of Lady Macbeth's practical and materialistic philosophy of life, that 'what's done, is done,' that a little water will suffice to cleanse from murder (II. 2. 67) and that sleep is all that is required to kill the remembrance of it. (III. 4. 147.)" To multiply instances is needless. Thus, we think we shall not be very far from justice if we say Shakespeare subscribes to this pessimism of Macbeth. The cumulative evidence of his other works lends sufficient colour to this view and points to that conclusion. We can catch an undertone of this poignant melancholy even in the midst of the boisterous buoyancy of his Comedies. The Clown of *The Twelfth Night* sings :

"What's love ? 'Tis not hereafter ;
Present mirth present laughter ;
What's to come is still unsure."

"Monsieur Melancholy's" "humorous sadness," in *As You Like It* is the outcome of his experience of "the sundry contemplation of his travels." His moralising on the "Sequestered Stag", dying

on the bank of a brook, and his pathetic humour in the seven stages of human life are but bubbles of the leaven which seems to whiz in "we two rail against our mistress, the world and all our misery." We cannot explain this away as mere freaks of Jaques. For we hear the Duke Senior say :

"I love to cope him in these sullen fits,
For then he's full of matter."

The storm that was suspected to be brewing breaks out with full fury in the Tragedies. The agonizing Lear tears his white hair and cries out :

"And thou all-shaking thunder,
Strike flat the thick rotundity o' the World."

Macbeth morosely observes as quoted above ; and Hamlet at the grave-scene gloomily remarks, "Alexander died, Alexander was buried, Alexander returneth into dust" etc, again

"Imperial Cæsar, dead and turned to clay,
Might stop a hole to keep the wind away :
O, that that earth, which kept the world at awe
Should patch a wall t'expel the winter's flaw ;"

And in his dying sigh he entreats Horatio :

"And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain
To tell my story."

Of course, we do not expect to hear optimism from characters like Macbeth, Lear and Hamlet.

But what we mean to say is that the author could, if he would, give us to understand that he had a different view ; and we doubt if he really had any. For, even in his later Romances which are the works of the happiest period of his life—a life of calmness and serenity—he could not free himself from this iron grip of melancholy. In *The Tempest* we hear Prospero echo the same sad tune :

“we are such a stuff
As dreams are made on ; and our little life
Is rounded with a sleep !”

And as if to make it all the more touching and impressive, Prospero is made to strike this woful note just when the masque to celebrate the happy betrothal of Miranda and Ferdinand is scarcely over—a Death's head in an Egyptian feast ! So we see Shakespeare like Jaques, his creature, “Sucks melancholy out of a song.”

From what has been shown above in facts and figures it is abundantly clear that whenever Shakespeare has been serious he has attempted to give expression to this dark view of life. No doubt, his Comedies ring with mirth and merriment and noisy joviality—which is their characteristic note. But that is only a funny life and not its serious aspect. That is rather

a frivolous representation of the bright side of things. For they are not enduring ; they have no true—no lasting value. They fleet away like the many coloured beauties of the sunset clouds, and all is soon shrouded under a vast sheet of gathering darkness ! His Falstaff—“the immortal, inimitable Falstaff” whom the whole auditorium rang with echoing merry peals to see and hear, who so captivated the heart of the virgin queen that Her Imperial Majesty wanted to see him in love, and in reverential compliance with the royal wish out came *The Merry Wives Of Windsor*—this Falstaff, this fountain-head of Elizabethan laughter is seen to lie, dying so miserably “of a burning quotidian tertian, that it is most lamentable to behold” This is human life. Does not the view of Macbeth tally with the life of Falstaff ? Thus the key-note of Shakespearian philosophy seems to be :

“For live how we can, yet die we must”

—a tune which is echoed in the melancholy sigh of Gray :

“The paths of glory lead but to the grave.”

This is truth, no doubt. But this is not the whole truth. For the grave is the *junction* and not the *terminus* of the paths which go far beyond. Longfellow very significantly declares :

“Life is real, life is earnest,
 And the grave is not its goal ;
 Dust thou art, to dust returnest
 Was not spoken of the soul,”

—a truth which is so glaringly conspicuous in the literature of the Orient that he who runs may read it. Even the political philosophy of the *Panchatantram* teaches : “Virtue is man's one and only friend that is sure to follow him after his death. All else perishes with the body.”

Shakespeare has seen life only on this side of death, and that again he has not seen in its entirety. The joys and sorrows that he has described are only seeming realities—the material side of life ; and that is why his joys are fleeting, and his sorrows have no redeeming feature. He has shown the dark side of life, turning it inside out. But he has nothing to say about how this gathering darkness can be turned into gladdening light, which shows the shortness of his vision. His poetic genius has got at the spirit of life as it *appears* and not as it really *is*. He has not seen behind the appearance where lies the true meaning of life—its spiritual significance. He has described only the ‘how’, but he has not discussed the ‘why’ of it. Thus he has dealt with only partial truths ; and it is to be

borne in mind that half-truths are worse than lies. Voltaire is said to have called him an 'inspired idiot'; and we very painfully remark that his was not an inspiration that could lift the veil of mystery behind life and beyond death and catch a glimpse of the Beatific Vision. He was not given the penetrating insight to have even a peep at that glorious realm, effulgent with soft and tranquil light—the kingdom of everlasting peace and happiness, which is the sure heritage of Faith, Hope and Charity. Thus bereft of eternal truth his picture of life appears in all its shocking hideousness !

It is held, and held for extolling, that Shakespeare cared very little for Reason or Philosophy. "His philosophy was the philosophy of the Shepherd Corin", who was quite sure 'that the greatest cause of night is the lack of the sun'. Indeed, the life of Shakespeare strongly verifies that he was utterly incapable of anything higher than the Shepherd-Philosophy. His early life at Stratford was exactly what the Shepherd in *The Winter's Tale* deprecates, saying ; "I would there were no age between ten and twenty-three. * * * For there is nothing, in the between, but getting wenches with-child, wronging the Ancientry, stealing, fighting." This is, no doubt, a

retrospection by the retired Shakespeare of his own early life. In London he led a worse career. "He was received into the playhouse as a servitor." "A late tradition gives him work as a holder of horses at the doors of suburban theatres." He lived in the midst of squalor and wickedness, boarding and lodging "in such an house"—to describe in the authoritative language of his Falstaff—"as none comes thither but the Thieves, Bawds and Ruffians." A man is known by the company he keeps. This truth is verified by a recorded anecdote of his life, which says how he one evening, impersonating William The Conqueror, forestalled and cheated Burbage under the pseudonym of Richard III of enjoying the sweet company of an infatuated city dame. Indeed, the tavern-life "yielded him the richest part of his harvest of observation." For on a receptive mind like his these things can not fall wholly for nothing. No doubt, "during these crucial years when the world flows in upon the mind, Shakespeare's takings were enormous." But to what effect? If you sow weeds you cannot expect to reap a rich harvest. Thus we see Shakespeare's conceptions "during those crucial years" could produce nothing higher than what they should: He has displayed masterly skill in the portraiture

of the dregs and riff-raffs of society—a Falstaff and a Pistol, a Dogberry and an Autolycus, an Iago and an Edmund, a Shylock and a Caliban. He has depicted the frivolities and sorrows of life, preached the insecurity of mundane existence and thundered, above all, the cruelties of an inscrutable Destiny. But of a peaceful life here, which is born of self-denial and philanthropic altruism, and of a reassuring hope of Eternal Beatitude hereafter, which is the reward of unflinching faith he has nothing to say, or shall we say, he has no conception.

However, it is said that this pessimism of Shakespeare is the outcome of his unbounded sympathy for the miseries of man. " which is the secret of Shakespeare's greatness." But we are not prepared to call that *sympathy* which, instead of holding out any hope to the suffering humanity by way of consolation, puts in bold relief, with all the power of forceful and vivid expression at his command, the horrid fabrications of the imagination, only to intensify and add to the bitterness of helpless despair ! Throughout the big volume of thirty-seven plays, attributed to Shakespeare, we never come across a single passage which bears even a semblance of what Victor Hugo puts in the mouth of his ideal man,

we mean, M. Myriel, the Bishop in *Les Misérables*. Hugo has also depicted with consummate skill the sorrows of humanity, yet he has the conception of the lofty and the sublime. Here is how the Bishop heals the harrowed heart of the ex-convict Jean Valjean : "Yes, you have come from a place of sorrow. Listen to me. There will be more joy in heaven over the tearful face of a repentant sinner than over the white robes of a hundred just men. If you leave that mournful place with thoughts of hatred and anger against your fellow-men, you are worthy of pity ; if you leave it with thoughts of kindness, gentleness and peace you are worth more than any of us." We say in all seriousness that Shakespeare wofully miscarried in handling the all-important problem—the problem of life. It was rather a nut too hard for him to crack, and as such, he cannot claim to be called a universal poet whose work must provide food for thought of every clime and age. If Shakespeare really cared very little for Philosophy and Reason, he also would be served the like by the Age of Reason and Philosophy. His dreamy and dusty view of life seems to have been admirably refuted by Longfellow in his *Psalm of Life* which begins with :

"Tell me not in mournful numbers
Life is but an empty dream,"

—and from which we have already quoted—as if in direct contradiction of Prospero's view, also of Macbeth's and Hamlet's.

Art for art's sake is not only idle but dangerous. Art, as long as it is constructive, is welcome. But we must shun it by all means if it assumes a destructive nature. If there is even an iota of truth in the Theory of Evolution, macrocosmic or microcosmic, anything destructive cannot hold long footing against the overwhelming forces of time. For truth must assert itself, sooner or later. And it is assuring that

"Old order changeth yielding place to new."

Thinking poets of the school of Wordsworth of the nineteenth century sought to unravel the mystery of Life and realize Self; and the mystic school of the present century is seen to make an attempt in the right direction. The East had solved the problem centuries before Christ was born. *The Upanishads* proclaim in solemn accents: Out of Beatitude does the Creation come into being, by Beatitude is it nourished into life and into Beatitude shall it merge and blend again; or in other words, unalloyed, unbounded and never-failing Bliss is the life's beginning and end and

also that which lies between. This exquisite joy spiritual, compared with which the highest temporal happiness pales into insignificance, can be realized by Self-culture, the consummation of which is Self-realization or identification of Self with the unconditioned, sempiternal Absolute. With how great a yearning do we look forward to the day when this sublime truth will find adequate expression in Poetry !

SOME OF THE CHARACTERS.

We shall now consider the delineation of a few of the characters of the Play.

Duncan :—Duncan has been supposed to be a noble and gracious king, amiable and affable by nature. But we cannot subscribe to this roseate view. Our impressions are somewhat different. The very first thing that strikes us as we set to studying king Duncan The Meek is that he is a sentimental autocrat ! And his autocracy is to be all the more dreaded for his credulity, easy excitability and his ruling and being ruled by impulses. He acts on the spur of the moment and has no second thoughts. He appoints no Minister, not to speak of a Council, to have some reasonable control over his arbitrary actions or even to give him prudent advice. Thus when

Ross reports to him about the disloyalty of Cawdor, he at once condemns the thane to "present death" without the least scruple. He is too impatient to wait to make an enquiry as to the veracity of the verbal report, nor does he question the sincerity of the reporter who is a stranger, we presume. For what is he? Is a thane above suspicion? Cawdor also is a thane; Macbeth also is a thane. The king seems to have no acquaintance with the "worthy thane of Ross." How can he be quite sure that he has no private grudge against Cawdor? He has no documentary evidence to prove the treason, nor does he carry any Despatch from some responsible authority, military or otherwise. Is it wise to take a stranger at his words which certainly have nothing of the oracle in them to carry conviction? This capital condemnation passed on Cawdor, without even a show of enquiry or trial, is to be seriously questioned in consideration of "our bosom interest" and

"He was a gentleman on whom I built
An absolute trust." Act I Sc 4 ll 13-14

And we must carefully think twice, we frankly say; before we rashly depend upon such "an absolute trust" as can be made to collapse any-time like a house of cards by the slightest breath

Again the treatment meted out to Banquo is simply revolting. By no means can this iniquity be accounted for. The extremely cold reception accorded to the rival of Macbeth takes us by surprise. If it is possible for the king to be so unprecedently gracious and affable, if it is possible for him to be really generous to a *fault*—a fault which cannot but be ingrained in his nature, nay, part and parcel of it—why should his liberal condescension be so questionably partial and so narrowly confined? Why should Macbeth alone be so unduly honoured and rewarded at the cruel exclusion of his worthy rival Banquo? Has he not shared in the day's toil? Has he not borne himself equally honourably, as Macbeth has done? Then, why this invidious distinction? Surely Duncan has done grave injustice to Banquo. He

“That has no less deserved, nor must be known
No less to have done so,”

is rewarded with what?—an honourable mention, a royal embrace! Indeed, this is the unkindest cut of all!

It is to be further regrettably noted that the king's gracious affability in regard to his honouring Macbeth is given such a sorry representation! Putting down a rebellion and defeating an inva-

sion, the magnitude of the gravity of each of which is considerably minimised by the fact that neither of them could offer a contested fight, and that the two together occupied only a few hours, as Ross's words, "In viewing o'er the rest o' the self-same day," prove, beyond doubt—cannot be a business of exceptional merits, especially, when it is taken into account that it is done, not wholly single-handed, but with the substantial help of another brother-in-arm of no inferior record. Viewed in this light, Macbeth, doubly bound as a General and a Scotchman, has done nothing more than an ordinary duty, which, as he himself owns, "pays itself," but the failure of which would surely bring shame on him and ruin his fair name and reputation. Of course, it would be unworthy and impolitic of Duncan not to generously appreciate his services consistently with his regal dignity. We do not object to his sending out Ross and Angus to greet him midway with the new title and "to herald him into his sight." But his overflowing thankfulness which gushes out in torrents, bubbling :

"O, worthiest cousin !

The sin of my ingratitude even now
Was heavy on me : thou art so far before,
The swiftest wing of recompense is slow

To overtake thee. Would thou hadst less deserved,
That the proportion both of thanks and payment
Might have been mine !” Act I Sc 4 ll 14-20.

—is, indeed, too much, and certainly borders on, nay, falls miserably into, foolish dotage. Yet, there is no cogent reason why he should be made to cut such a sorry figure. However, this much can be allowed, though not reluctantly, in consideration of his senility. But his next proposal,

“From hence to Inverness
And bind us further to you”, ll 42-43

is the last straw on the back of the camel Tolerance. It is not only unstatesmanlike but simply shocking and unthinkable. In short, it is anything but royal. Duncan may be gracious and affable to a degree, nay, to a fault. But here the fault does not seem to lean on virtue's side. It rather bespeaks his weakness, incapacity, and shall we say, nepotism. To tell the truth, this undue and unkingly condescension is hardly justifiable. But there is no help for it. Because it is a dramatic necessity. And we too would certainly refrain from remarking, if we could only help it, that the development of the plot here was too loosely handled. Even to a passive listener it is quite clear that the foolish bird is

going to perch on the fatal lime, and he surely thinks with Lady Macbeth—though in quite a different spirit,—“O, never shall sun that morrow see!” This chance for a sure fore-cast lamentably mars the dramatic effect. Further, when we contemplate the dastardly assassination, it would be telling a lie to say that our sympathy with the hapless victim is not alloyed with a touch of the feeling that the weak, incapacitated king is only served right—an inevitable consequence of his over-anxious and unkingly adulation to please a vassal !

Banquo :—“Nor could the traditional ancestor of the House of Stuarts”, remarks an editor, “be held up to infamy in a play that was designed to pay special compliment to the first Stuart occupant of the English throne”. But our very first acquaintance with Banquo does not seem very promising. Ross and Angus greet Macbeth with the title of thane of Cawdor and the royal appreciation,

“His wonders and his praises do contend
Which should be thine or his.” Act I Sc 3 ll 92-93

Banquo must be smarting under a sense of cruel injustice and ingratitude. He cannot bear this and thus betrays himself :

“Look, how our partner’s rapt.” Act I Sc 3 ll 142

Mark the word 'partner' here. In a single word he seeks to convey the whole volume of his surging feelings. He shows that, after all, he is no more than an ordinary man—in the sense in which, the first murderer said to Macbeth, "we are men, my liege," III. 1.9)—and so he cannot be credited with supreme self-possession. He partly lays bare his lacerated heart and tries to make himself more intelligible by his next remark :

"New honours come upon him," Act I Sc 3 ll 144
—which must be the outward expression of the rankling thought, Not a word even to greet me with ! Of course, Banquo has reason to feel very keenly this iniquity of Duncan. Yet, it would be better for him to maintain that equanimity of mind, that philosophic calmness that would surely go to add a new lustre to his character.

But the worst is yet to be shown. Macbeth has usurped the throne of Scotland by murdering the king. Banquo knows this perfectly well, as is quite evident from his soliloquy which says in part :

"Thou play'dst most foully for't." Act III Sc 1 ll 3

Then how can he, an honest man of honour, stoop so low as to submit himself to the service

of that crowned assassin ? When the murder was announced, he was the very first to take up the solemn vow :

“In the great hand of God I stand ; and thence
Against the undivulged pretence I fight
Of treasonous malice”. Act II Sc 1 ll 256-58

This is, no doubt, quite befitting the chivalry of Banquo. But how does he redeem it ? by kissing the dust off the feet of the same regicide, against whom he is pledged to fight ! He does not probe the matter to the very bottom, nor does he make a sifting enquiry to worm, if not to force, out “the undivulged pretence”, as his fidelity to his own honour and to the salt of his master demands ; but he sacrifices, without any scruple, his towering honour—which ought to be preserved spotless even at the cost of life—to mean and mistaken prudence, and ignominiously bends before a wind which he has no reason to fear very high—a grievous blunder that before long costs him his life ! Yet this Banquo is given the most glowing tribute through the mouth of Macbeth, his rival—no doubt, to lend additional colour. Macbeth soliloquizes :

“Our fears in Banquo
stick deep ; and in his royalty of nature
Reigns that which would be fear’d: ’tis much he dares ;

And, to that dauntless temper of his mind,
 He hath a wisdom that doth guide his valour
 To act in safety. There is none but he
 Whose being I do fear : and, under him,
 My Genius is rebuked ; as, it is said,
 Mark Antony's was by Cæsar." Act III Sc 1 ll 49-57

But words are mere meaningless, airy sound unless they are verified by actions. And as for Banquo, his actions very strongly belie these magnificent words of his rival's appreciation. He should have done like Macduff, his junior, we may say, who, following him, took the self-same oath and, true to his words, severed all connections with the felon to keep his honour from being soiled.

We really pity this most formidable but fallen opponent of Macbeth, who once very proudly threw in the teeth of his compeer :

"So I lose none
 In seeking to augment it, but still keep
 My bosom franchised and allegiance clear,"

Act II Sc 1 ll 26-28

—we really pity this Banquo when we hear him say fawningly :

"Let your highness
 Command upon me ; to the which my duties
 Are with a most indissoluble tie
 For ever knit." Act III Sc 1 ll 16-19

Poor Banquo! But we know why he has been forced to this cringing—dishonoured life. It is a dramatic necessity. But to lessen the trouble of the dramatist such a noble and chivalrous character ought not to be spoiled !

Malcolm :—His generous and grateful confession :

“This is the sergeant
Who like a good and hardy soldier fought
Against my captivity”, Act I Sc 2 ll 4-6

—seemed to show him to be the true son of his gracious father. But we are disappointed to see him fly post-haste with his brother, as soon as he hears the news of the murder of his father. But where do they fly to ? To their home, to be sure ! Certainly not. The elder brother rides with break-neck speed to England. While the younger one crosses the sea over to Ireland !

Here is another dramatic necessity marring another noble character. It is really dishonouring the illustrious dead to clothe his sons in this shameful cowardice ! Their venerable old father lies dead in a pool of blood. The very thought, not to speak of the heart-rending sight, should awaken all the son in them to cry furiously for revenge ! But what do we see them about ? They are making straight for the horse, when all else

lies in confusion ! They are not inclined "to be dainty of leave-taking"—not even to catch a glimpse, a last sight of their aged and affectionate father whom the cruel hand of murder has forced into everlasting sleep ! They set off at once, leaving the poor dead to take care of its own funeral ! Is life so precious ? Yet, they have no good reason to fear their insecurity in Scotland. Macbeth is not yet all-powerful. There is Banquo who is, in no way, inferior to Macbeth. He is quite a match for him, nay, even superior, as we have heard from his soliloquy. And this Banquo has solemnly pledged himself to "fight of treasonous malice", and would probably make good his words and be spared the ignominy but for their unexpected slipping away without consultation. There are, besides, the valiant Macduff and others of no mean importance who are likewise sworn. Then why this shameful flight "against nature still"? only to make the coast clear for the free development of the plot.

But we have not yet seen the Prince of Cumberland completely. He has not been long away from Scotland, when Macduff goes to bring him back. Hare-hearted that he is, he naturally suspects the honesty of the noble thane of Fife and puts him to a *severe* test; for "modest

wisdom plucks him From over-credulous haste.”
Says the prince :

“I am young ; but something
You may deserve of him through me, and wisdom
To offer up a weak poor innocent lamb
To appease an angry god.” Act IV Sc 3 ll 14-17

Well, can this “weak poor innocent lamb”
vomit out filth like this ?

“but there’s no bottom, none
In my voluptuousness : your wives, your daughters,
Your matrons and your maids, could not fill up
The cistern of my lust.” ll 60-63

He says, “I am yet Unknown to woman”, IV. 3
25-26 ; yet, the *boy* knows what lust means, and
what is more, wives, daughters, even matrons and
maids are essentially requisite for the purpose !
His own words are in evidence that he is surfeited
already. But we think we are not doing His Royal
Highness justice. For it is the *old* Shakespeare
that speaks through the *young* Malcolm.

Be that as it may, what does the thane say
in reply ?

“We have willing dames enough ; there cannot be
That vulture in you, to devour so many
As will to greatness dedicate themselves,
Finding it so inclined.” ll 73-76

To think that a young prince should propose
before an elderly thane to outrage the modesty

of his wife and daughters, and the thane should complacently consent to supply more than the demand ! In the name of decency this ought to have been omitted !

Now we shall consider the "modest wisdom" of the prince, as revealed in the *severe* test. Malcolm seeks to falsely represent himself as a villain before Macduff who has known him from his very infancy, and who has not missed him long. Are we to believe the England of that day to have been so enchanted a land of the Sirens of "English Epicures" that the Scotch Prince is transformed into a brute, nay, the Devil himself in so short a time ? It is worse than ludicrous that the Crown Prince should try to sound the sincerity of Macduff by such hyperbolic detraction of himself. Again, does a villain ever confess that he is a villain ? His very attempt to represent himself as such is in itself a strong argument to prove the contrary ; and any man who has a grain of intelligence in him can see that straight. Maybe, he wants to know if Macduff is bent upon taking him back to Scotland any how—even if he is the very breeding place of these diabolic sins. For then he will have good reasons to suspect him. Yet, he ought to know that no spy, skilled in the art of betraying, is so

foolish as not to see through the childish plan.

Supporters may set up a defence by advancing that these puerile self-accusations of the young prince testify to the author's profound knowledge of human nature. For the boy cannot be expected to manage it more intelligently. But the honest conviction of the thane of Fife, as expressed in his *apostrophe* to Scotland which says in part :

"By his own interdiction stands accursed,
And does blaspheme his breed," ll 107-08

—gives them the lie direct. This is further borne out by the fact that when Malcolm unsays his words, Macduff does not admit that he knows it full well and has consequently not believed him to be so. He only says ;

"Such welcome and unwelcome things at once
'Tis hard to reconcile," ll 138-39

—which rather proves that he actually took him at his words, but is now exceeding glad to have been so deceived.

Lady Macduff :—Our acquaintance with Lady Macduff is very short, indeed. We are introduced to her ladyship in Act IV Sc 2. But in the course of a single scene we have seen so much

of her that there is no room for grudging: that we have not known her longer. Macduff fled to England so suddenly that he could not consult his wife. This has so sorely incensed her ladyship that she won't listen to reason. She has enjoyed the joint-life long and has been the mother of a number of children, yet, we are sorry that she has not carefully studied her husband. She says, "He loves us not ; he wants the natural tie." That is not all. Her fury goes further. "Sirrah," says she to her child, "your father's dead." We have not heard the worst yet. The child asks, "Was my father a traitor, mother ?" "Ay, that he was" is the relentless reply. "What is a traitor ?" "Why, one that swears and lies." Evidently she refers to the laws of matrimony. She goes on, "Every one that does so is a traitor," and is not satisfied till she pronounces the sentence, "and must be hanged" ! The condemnation frightens the child, and he very uneasily asks, "Must they all be hanged who swear and lie?" "Every one" is the denouncing reply of the termagant !

But we know how tenderly has Macduff loved his wife and children. When Ross breaks the news of the ghastly massacre, Macduff shudders : "Merciful heaven !" In reply to

the *boy* Malcolm's unfelt lip-consolation he says in *half-aside*, "He has no children," and then bursts out :

"All my pretty ones ?
Do you say all ? O hell-kite ! All ?
What, all my pretty chickens and their dam
At one fell swoop ?" Act IV Sc 3 ll 215-18

The unfortunate father and lover has been struck home. He is completely broken down. He won't be consoled. He is a prey to remorse for having left them so helpless. His grief is eloquent in :

"But I must also feel it as a man :
I cannot but remember such things were,
That were most precious to me. Did heaven look on,
And would not take their part ? Sinful Macduff,
They were all struck for thee ! naught that I am,
Not for their own demerits, but for mine,
Fell slaughter on their souls. Heaven rest them now !"
Act IV Sc 3 ll 221-27.

Such a fund of love has he treasured up in his bosom. But how is it requited ? Why, he is condemned as a traitor to his conjugal faith and must be hanged on that account !

We have not yet said all about the woman. To exhibit her in her true colour we cannot do better than quote a little more from the dialogue of the mother and her baby. Her fury spent,

Lady Macduff very playfully says to her child, "Yes, he is dead ; how wilt thou do for a father ? The urchin is quite a match for the matron. He retorts, "Nay, how will you do for a husband ?" Notice that he knows that a husband is as urgently required for a woman as a father for a child ! The mother with shameless gratification readily replies, "Why, I can buy me twenty at any market." And sharp goes the stripling's rejoinder, "Then, you'll buy 'em to sell again" !

Is it not a very nice picture ?—a lady of rank lightly talking with her suckling about trafficking in husbands ! Can anything else be more preposterous ? But the topic does not end there. After wishing that her husband be hanged for leaving them so suddenly for reasons she does not know, nor even cares to know, she reverts to the subject with apparently increasing zest and asks the child again, "But how wilt thou do for a father ?" The "egg" very wittily rejoins, "If he were dead you'd weep for him : if you would not, it were a good sign that I should quickly have a new father."

Poor Macduff ! This is the sample of the ove your wife and children bear you ! Bitter scorn is thousand times more welcome than

to be so trifled with. Is this child by a former husband ? For so he appears to be.

Shakespeare would do well, at least for the sake of decorum, if not for any other consideration, to omit this shocking chit-chat of a mother with her baby. Such a light representation of the pure domestic life by the *greatest of dramatists* does more harm to society than a legion of immoral fathers of the Grub-Street literature !

[It is to be viewed with alarm that this and such like exhibitions of the Western Civilization have undermined and are still undermining the high morals of the East. So it is high time that Orientals should be on their guard against such poisonous filth.]

By the way, we regret to have to record here that in this play Shakespeare has done grave injustice to the Fair Sex. Throughout the whole drama we come across only two female characters worth noticing—Lady Macbeth and Lady Macduff. The heroine, “the Clytemnestra of English Tragedy,” is drawn in such a lurid, malignant light that every bosom heaves a heavy sigh as soon as it is relieved of her grim, fire-breathing presence ; while the other, as we have noticed just above, poisons the atmosphere and

shakes the very foundation of society itself ! Shakespeare, if he only liked, could have endowed this Lady Macduff with soft feminine graces, in contrast with the befitting Consort of Lucifer, to win the heart of the audience by her tender love and affection. The heartless, ghastly massacre would then have been all the more touching and pathetic. But the author seems to have purposely let go this splendid opportunity of paying his tribute to his mothers and sisters and thereby giving a new tone to the whole drama. And as if to make his denunciation stingy and more scathing, he brings out the three bearded weird sisters, the ugly and repulsive agents of the Devil, as other specimens of the fair sex ! Thus we see, and see very painfully, indeed, the *greatest* dramatic poet has wilfully been the *bitterest* woman-hater in the *best* of his plays !

THE DEATH OF LADY MACBETH.

We must now conclude with our remarks on the death of Lady Macbeth. We have not seen Macbeth and his wife together since the former went out to consult the witches for the second time. We last saw them at the banquet scene *i.e.* Act III. Sc 4, and since there has been a

blank through the two succeeding Acts. At the beginning of the Fifth Act we come to learn that Lady Macbeth has been a victim to somnambulism. In vain do we look for to see Macbeth by the sick-bed of his "dearest chuck" and we cannot account for this utter neglect. We have only once heard him ask the physician in charge, "How does your patient, doctor?" Then when the catastrophe is drawing near, one day a cry of women announces the death of the suffering Queen. And what is Macbeth's observation on it?

"She should have died hereafter!" Act V Sc 5 ll 16.—as though Lady Macbeth had control over Death as over himself, and accordingly she ought to have had the goodness, or for the matter of that, the reasonableness to die conveniently and at an opportune time, instead of adding to his already encumbering embarrassments—a time when he might be free to attend to her funeral obsequies, if he so desired! A more callous, a more unnaturally cynical remark can hardly be imagined. Yet, time was when she was his "dearest partner of greatness"—his "dearest love".

Critics who have vowed themselves to countenance everything of Shakespeare, who uphold even his ugliness and make it appear in all loveli-

ess under a transparent veneering, adduce specious arguments to justify this unjustifiable conduct of Macbeth. They hold, "This is due to the separating power of partnership in guilt", which they regard as "one of the play's great lessons". They blow hot and cold from the same mouth. They extol Lady Macbeth for her self-less ambition, a more potent, a deadlier incentive because born of love"—an ambition that rather costs her the most supreme sacrifice of self" (a statement, which we shall subsequently anatomize). Yet this devoted, self-sacrificing woman is, according to their opinion, separates herself from her beloved lord for *partnership in guilt*. Does Nature support such theory ? certainly not. Birds of the same feather flock together. Partnership in guilt draws the accomplices closer, and when born of passion, binds the parties in a life-long wed-lock or with each other. And there is no use denying that they are sometimes made to part—that is certainly due, not to any sense of the guilt and the consequent penitence—which is a rare cause of such separation when the parties are on the way to reclamation—but to reasons, far different. They are either brought to book or revenged upon ; or, as Goldsmith very pathetically puts it :

"When lovely woman stoops to folly
 And finds too late that men betray,—
 What charm can soothe her melancholy,
 What art can wash her guilt away?"

History and literature bristle with striking instances. The union of Clytemnestra and Ægisthus, to quote only one example, strongly proves our point. Even Shakespeare himself provides an instance which approaches very near to this—we mean the marriage of Hamlet's mother with his uncle within a month of the poisoned death of his father, the king—

"Ere yet the salt of most unrighteous tears
 Had left the flushing in her galled eyes,
 She married ; O, most wicked speed, to post
 With such dexterity to incestuous sheet !"

The union of Fancesca and Paola is also a case in point. The blood-curdling torments of *Inferno* could not separate the guilty lovers.

There is no use multiplying instances. Man is said, and said rightly, to be a social being. If he wants companionship, never can he want it more pressingly than when he has cut himself thoroughly off the outside world by his shocking deeds of villainy. Hence it is only likely and natural that partners in guilt should come closer together to make a clean breast of each other and should highly value and yearn for each other's company,

s each has cast in his lot with the other ; and the fear of a betrayal also tends to make the tie all the harder to sever. And this is more probable when the delinquents are man and wife and eloved of each other.

We must quote, in support of our view, the weighty testimony of no less an authority than Edmund Burke. This great observer of human nature very strongly remarks : "It is said by some idle, absurd moralists that friendship is a thing that cannot exist between bad men ; but I will show to your Lordships the direct contrary." And he shows by saying, "He (Warren Hastings) parted with his power, he parted with his situation, he parted with every thing ; but he never could part with Gunga Govin Sing. He was upon the Ganges, he had quitted his government ; and his last dying sigh, in his last parting voice, was Gunga Govin Sing.

* * * It demonstrated the power of friendship."

If this was true in the case of a white and a much-hated black man, who were as differently situated as the two Poles, how much more should have been so of Macbeth and his "dearest love!"

But we have strayed far away and must

revert to our subject. Now, is it poetic justice to let this arch-criminal, the Evil Genius of Macbeth escape so easily, leaving her husband, her poor creature to bear alone the pangs of inward tortures and tribulations? True it is that Shakespeare has tried to make the retribution of Nemesis manifest in her somnambulism. But we do not call that *punishment* that she is put to when she is not in her senses. A talker and walker in sleep cannot correctly recollect what he does in his sleep. Thus the harrowing effect is totally lost. Again, it is a fact that even our most absorbing thoughts, as of ecstatic joy or gnawing bereavement, do not often come in dreams; and if they ever come, they come in hopeless confusion or in quite a different light. Further, we hesitate to believe that somnambulism is a natural consequence of horrible thoughts. Let us see what Bucknill has to say on the subject. The author of *The Mad Folk of Shakespeare* observes: "Whether the deep melancholy of remorse often tends to exhibit itself in somnambulism is a fact which may, on scientific grounds, be doubted." Granting, however, that brooding over the horrors of past misdeeds brings in such a malady, does that absolve the author? In all her sleep-talking we do not

hear even a single word of contrition fall from her lips. She has shown no signs in that direction when she is in her senses. How can we then bring ourselves to believe that she has been a prey to remorse? Her guilty conscience has not made her startle at the rustling wind, fear a murderer in every bush or eye everybody with the bitterest feelings of suspicion. Nor has the sense of guilt awakened in her a softening feeling that may excite pity. She is as adamant as ever.

Some, however, try to make the death of this hard-hearted virago appear as pathetic. They hopelessly attempt to squeeze water out of flint. They labour hard to bring out some redeeming features of her character, and strain their eyes to catch the faintest gleam of a seeming virtue and give it a million-fold magnification! Thus one editor declaims: "She 'unsexes, herself and renounces the influences of her better nature ; but she does it for Macbeth's sake alone. She exemplifies all the evils of an uncontrolled ambition, but the ambition is not for self, rather it costs her the most supreme sacrifice of self.' " This is, no doubt, very nice to read, and we wish it were true ; and one who has not gone through the original—which is

generally the case, at least, with nine hundred and ninety-nine out of a thousand—will naturally conclude that the self-less woman must have, after the installation of her husband, gone to a nunnery or led the life of a recluse and possibly met with a mournful death. But surely he will not credit the writer for being so imposed upon, if he chances to come to know that she did nothing of the kind—and in fact, such an idea never crossed her mind—but with apparent relish shared the royalty with her husband. Lady Macbeth was old enough to clearly see that the fortune of her husband meant her own fortune. The shrewd woman had no difficulty to understand to her satisfaction that if Macbeth became king her queenship was a foregone conclusion. She was filled through and through with this indirect selfishness. Even Holinshed is very particular to mention this point. The chronicler says, “She that was verie ambitious, burning in vnquenchable desire to beare the name of a queene.” Shakespeare has also been true to his original. Lady Macbeth goads her husband on to the perpetration of the horrible crime much against his will. If Macbeth would not wear a blood-stained crown, why does the devoted wife force it upon him—if not led by a latent “burn-

ing desire" for self-aggrandisement ? Self-less woman ! Does she ever say that she is inspired with the purest spirit of self-denial ? Far from it. On the contrary she exhibits the strong passion for self-seeking by her words and actions many times over. Here is what the unselfish woman says in Act 1 Sc 5.

" Which shall to all *our* nights and days to come
Give solely sovereign sway and masterdom." ll 67-68

—a rhyme which implies emphatic conclusion. Again in Act III. Sc. 2. she says to herself :

"Naught's had, all's spent,
Where *our* desire is got without content." ll 4-5

The idea of self is so ingrained in her nature that she cannot forget it even in her sleep. Says she in her delirium : " What need *we* fear who knows it, when none can call *our* power to account ? "

Indeed, these are the speeches of a self-denying woman. And if this is a case of "supreme sacrifice of self", then we must very painfully think that the standard of Self-sacrifice has been considerably lowered.

Thus in the opinion of these critics the death of this self-sacrificing woman is to be bewailed, because it is supposed that she is self-consumed. Her indomitable will failing to sustain her to the

last, she commits suicide. Of course, the opposition stands on the doubtful authority of

“Who, as 'tis thought, by self and violent hands
Took off her life.” Act V Sc. 8 ll 70-71

—a passing mention at the very end of the play, by way of parenthesis, as it were—a mention, most uncalled-for, and consequently most undramatic. Yet it does not say authoritatively—“as 'tis thought”—but it is a pure conjecture.

However, does her committing suicide excite in us true pity? We may pity her for her weakness—for her inability to bring herself to repent. But it is not that praying pity that earnestly looks up to bring down heavenly mercy wherewith to temper justice—a pity that is drawn per force to the penitent soul and tries to blunt the edge of keen remorse with tearful sympathy!

CONCLUSION.

Thus we see Shakespeare is Shakespeare mostly through his advertising critics who make the daring attempt to read between the lines and force out a hidden meaning or supply one where there is none. Led by a patriotic motive, they assume the colouring office of the dressing

master in the green-room, who sends out actors to the stage after carefully concealing all wrinkles and deformities under a skilful paint—a real camouflage ! Dramas, unlike epics or lyrics, are meant not so much for private study as for representation. So their very nature demands that they must needs be intelligible even to passive listeners and by no means should be esoteric. Hence the primary object of the playwright clearly seems to awaken contemporary interest. He must first please the audience of his time, and if his work is of solid worth, that may win him undying fame. But the case of Shakespeare seems rather anomalous. He was born in the most prolific and palmy days of dramatic literature, we mean, the Elizabethan Age. He is credited with possessing a profound knowledge of human nature. So it is to be expected that he must have tried his level best to provide for the men of his time. And that he did so is quite evident from his many references to co-eval events of absorbing interest. Further, he was not an amateur playwright. He had to earn his living by producing plays. His going out of his way to compliment and please the two sovereigns and other persons of distinction shows how he hankered after courting the royal or

aristocratic favour. Then, why was he not as adequately admired by the galaxy of Elizabethan worthies as now—not even by those of the two succeeding centuries? Ben Jonson was then the most popular, and we may say, the Prince of Dramatists. It cannot be said Shakespeare wrote in advance of his age. His persistent introductions of the foolish superstitions of the day clearly show that he did not. Again, the early Age of Imagination was more suited for poetry than the Age of Reason. That is why Milton deplored that he was born in an age too late. Romantic plays had greater chance of being rightly appreciated at the time when the production of the *Fairie Queene* was possible, when Chivalry was still in vogue and when Drake circumnavigated the World, and the very atmosphere seemed saturated with the spirit of Romanticism.

